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**MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA**

## **THESIS**

**SOUTHERN THAI INSURGENCY AND THE PROSPECT  
FOR INTERNATIONAL TERRORIST GROUP  
INVOLVEMENT**

by

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June 2012

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**SOUTHERN THAI INSURGENCY AND THE PROSPECT FOR  
INTERNATIONAL TERRORIST GROUP INVOLVEMENT**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis explores the cause of the southern Thailand insurgency and the possibility that international terrorist groups have become involved in it. The insurgency began as an ethnic struggle by Malay Muslims for independence from predominantly Buddhist Thailand. But with the advent of the “global war on terrorism,” some scholars believe it has become an increasingly religious one. They fear that if the insurgency has become Islamist, it will attract support from international terrorist groups, which will bring funds, training, and ideology to the already violent conflict. This thesis investigates these possibilities. It finds that Islam has grown in importance, but the struggle remains driven primarily by ethnic separatist, not religious, aims. Since it remains ethnic in nature, international terrorists have not taken a significant role in the movement. The ideological gap between them and the insurgents remains too wide. Nevertheless, it is worth monitoring the situation as the danger of international terrorists becoming involved exists if the insurgency becomes a religious struggle.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>I.</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>A.</b>	<b>MAJOR RESEARCH QUESTIONS .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>B.</b>	<b>IMPORTANCE.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>C.</b>	<b>PROBLEMS AND HYPOTHESES .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>D.</b>	<b>LITERATURE REVIEW .....</b>	<b>5</b>
1.	Ethnic or Religious?.....	6
2.	Involvement of Foreign Elements.....	9
3.	Conclusion .....	16
<b>E.</b>	<b>METHODS AND SOURCES.....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>II.</b>	<b>CULTURAL OR RELIGIOUS? .....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>A.</b>	<b>HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF ISLAM IN SOUTHERN THAILAND .....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>B.</b>	<b>SHIFT FROM ETHNIC TO RELIGIOUS FOCUS .....</b>	<b>23</b>
1.	Post-World War II Assimilation Policies.....	23
a.	<i>Thaksin's Martial Law in the Southern Provinces.....</i>	<i>25</i>
b.	<i>Thaksin's Punishment of Neighborhoods Supporting Insurgency: Red, Yellow, and Green Zones.....</i>	<i>27</i>
2.	Lack of Support from Malaysia.....	29
3.	Students More Schooled in Islam .....	30
4.	Fear of the Spread of Global Terrorism .....	31
<b>C.</b>	<b>CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>III.</b>	<b>INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT.....</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>A.</b>	<b>INTERNATIONAL TERRORIST GROUPS .....</b>	<b>38</b>
1.	The Argument for a Connection.....	38
a.	<i>Personal Connections .....</i>	<i>38</i>
b.	<i>Training and Propaganda .....</i>	<i>40</i>
c.	<i>Safe Havens.....</i>	<i>42</i>
2.	Evaluating the Connection.....	43
<b>B.</b>	<b>MALAYSIA'S ROLE IN SOUTHERN THAILAND .....</b>	<b>44</b>
1.	Funding.....	45
2.	Training and Materiel .....	46
3.	Ease of Border Crossing to Malaysia .....	48
<b>C.</b>	<b>COORDINATION BETWEEN THAILAND AND MALAYSIA.....</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>D.</b>	<b>CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>IV.</b>	<b>CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>57</b>
<b>A.</b>	<b>PROPOSITIONS FOR FUTURE INCREASE IN INTERNATIONAL TERRORIST GROUP INVOLVEMENT.....</b>	<b>58</b>
<b>B.</b>	<b>HOW TO END INSURGENCY AND AVOID INTERNATIONAL TERRORIST GROUP INVOLVEMENT.....</b>	<b>59</b>
	<b>LIST OF REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>61</b>
	<b>INITIAL DISTRIBUTION LIST .....</b>	<b>67</b>

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# **I. INTRODUCTION**

## **A. MAJOR RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

At various times over the past several decades, Malay Muslims in southern Thailand have undertaken military campaigns to win independence or autonomy from Bangkok. The current campaign began about a decade ago and has resulted in thousands of deaths. The conventional wisdom holds that the current conflict—like earlier rounds—is almost entirely motivated by ethnic differences between Malay and Thai citizens of Thailand. However, the coincidence of this round with the rising concern global jihadi terrorist networks has led observers to ask whether religion has become a more important source of the conflict and whether foreign terrorist networks have become involved in the conflict.

This thesis examines the primary reason the separatists in southern Thailand continue to fight, asks whether their motivation to fight has changed in recent years, and investigates the role of foreign actors in the conflict. It illustrates the mutual but varied importance of ethnicity and religion for the Malay Muslim fighters and describes the level of foreign involvement in the conflict. It is based on the premise that effective policies to bring peace to the area must rest on an accurate assessment of why insurgents fight and where they obtain support. If decision makers understand the motivation of the fighters, the origins of support for the movement, and the level of foreign government support that security forces can rely on, they will be better equipped to design policies to end the almost decade-long current iteration of the insurgency.

The two schools of thought describing the southern Thailand insurgency as either ethnic with religious tones or mainly religious reflect two contrasting views of the insurgency's origins. This thesis assesses the relative importance of ethnicity and religion in the conflict. For many years, the movement in southern Thailand has been considered an ethnically charged separatist movement that pits a Malay minority against

a Thai majority.<sup>1</sup> Although authors have recognized that the religions of the two groups are different—Malays are mainly Muslim, and Thais are mainly Buddhist—they have argued that ethnic difference is the driving factor in the violent conflict. However, since September 2001, it has become more common for some authors to emphasize religious differences between the two groups as the main reason for the conflict.<sup>2</sup> This thesis will examine the logic of these two schools of thought and anticipate the implications of international terror group involvement in the border area. The likelihood of effective foreign terrorist influence is anticipated by examining the support structure of the insurgency. If support comes from jihadist organizations, then it would follow that there exists a reasonable chance that the insurgency becomes more of a global danger. If support comes from sympathetic Malays in Malaysia or Thailand, the insurgency will most likely remain local.

## **B. IMPORTANCE**

Malay Muslims in southern Thailand have launched rebellions against Thai rule several times since 1903.<sup>3</sup> The current iteration of the conflict started in January of 2004 and continues today. Since then, violence has intensified as insurgents adopt more effective tactics, and insurgents now control large parts of the region. As a major non-NATO ally and a partner in the global war on terrorism, Thailand's political stability is important to the United States. It is important to determine the extent to which international terrorist groups are involved in the conflict in southern Thailand to reach the most efficient way to end the violence in the region. If domestic groups typically drive

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<sup>1</sup> Astri Suhrke, "Loyalists and Separatists: The Muslims in Southern Thailand," *Asian Survey* 17:3 (1977): 237. See also S. P. Harish, "Ethnic or Religious Cleavage? Investigating the Nature of the Conflict in Southern Thailand," *Contemporary Southeast Asia: A Journal of International and Strategic Affairs* 28:1 (2006): 65.

<sup>2</sup> See Peter Chalk, "Separatism and Southeast Asia: The Islamic Factor in Southern Thailand, Mindanao, and Aceh," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 24 (2001): 241–269; Rohan Gunaratna, Arabinda Acharya, and Sabrina Chua, eds., *Conflict and Terrorism in Southern Thailand* (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish Academic, 2005); Greg Sheridan, "Jihad Archipelago," *The National Interest* 78 (Winter 2004/2005): 73–80; Joseph Chinyong Liow, "The Security Situation in Southern Thailand: Toward an Understanding of Domestic and International Dimensions," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 27 (2004): 531–548; and Moshe Yegar, *Between Integration and Secession: The Muslim Communities of the Southern Philippines, Southern Thailand, and Western Burma/Myanmar* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2002).

<sup>3</sup> Gunaratna, Acharya, and Chua, *Conflict*, 4.

the violence, then the best policies will be ones by the Thai government that address the concerns of Thai Muslims. Conversely, if international terrorist groups are involved, there may be a greater need for cooperation between Thailand and the United States to identify and limit connections between Thai insurgents and their foreign supporters.

The main divergence in the literature is that some believe the conflict to be ethnically-charged, while others believe that the religion of Islam is the driving force. If the source of the violence in southern Thailand is misidentified on this broad of a scope, the potential for mishandling the conflict is high. The school that believes that the violence stems from the Muslim heritage of the people in southern Thailand is not disingenuous when some assert that the insurgency will (or has) become a focal point of international terrorist groups. If this assumption is false, then the governments of Thailand and Malaysia may focus their efforts on people and regions that cannot help the problem in the region. Likewise, scholars who insist that it is an ethnic-based conflict may be overlooking the potential for international terrorist group involvement. The root of the conflict must be understood before any actions are taken if they are to be effective.

### **C. PROBLEMS AND HYPOTHESES**

One of the major problems in the literature dealing with the southern Thailand insurgency is the interpretation of the cause of the violence. Almost all scholars agree that religion and ethnicity are involved at some level, but recommended measures to stop the conflict depend on which one an author interprets as the main source of the violence. While many are able to propose solutions that seem realistic, others tend to adopt a more extreme view of the situation. Gunaratna et al. and Abuza seem convinced that southern Thailand is ripe for direct international terrorist group involvement.<sup>4</sup> The problem with analyses such as these is that the treatment of the people may become as extreme as the ideology behind the reason for prosecuting an operation to quell the insurgency. If the Thai security forces begin an all-out military operation because they are convinced that

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<sup>4</sup>Zachary Abuza, *Conspiracy of Silence: The Insurgency in Southern Thailand* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2009), 232–233 and Gunaratna, Acharya, and Chua, *Conflict*, 94–95.

southern Thai rebels are directly linked to international terrorist organizations, then it may end up being a self-fulfilling prophecy, especially if the United States becomes directly involved.

The problem with misidentifying the root of the insurgency is that, in either case, the conflict will be prolonged, and more people will die. If the scholars who favor an ethnic interpretation of the insurgency are wrong, then the potential for actual links to international terrorism exist, and appropriate steps must be taken to end this connection and keep the insurgency local until it can be resolved. However, if the scholars who believe that religious differences are the main motivation are wrong, then counter-insurgency policies should not be directed against religious networks; if they are, they may actually encourage assistance from international terrorist groups.

One could frame this problem in relation to support networks for the insurgency. If support generally stems from Malay networks, it would follow that the struggle is mainly ethnic in nature. If international terror groups such as Jemaah Islamiyah or Al Qaeda contribute major funds to the insurgency, it would seem that the insurgency is more of an Islamic struggle. The former support structure would imply that if conditions remain unchanged, the insurgency will continue to be local with cross-border support from sympathetic Malays. The latter support structure implies that the struggle may become part of a global jihadist struggle. Since U.S. forces have left Iraq, an entire theater of ideologically-driven fighters has a more limited number Western targets to attack. Thailand, a major ally of the United States, may present a new opportunity for these or other fighters.

My hypothesis is that ethnic differences are the main source of the conflict, but because of changing international views on Islam and Malaysia's official renouncement of the insurgency, Islam has become more prominent. Malaysia's separation from the insurgency is significant because it diminishes the credibility of insurgent groups, which claim that rejoining Malaysia is a goal of their struggle. Once the security forces realize that the problem is that the people of southern Thailand simply want to retain their culture, it is vital for them not to forget that the people are Muslim. Islam may not have been the reason the Malays in southern Thailand were fighting, but it now plays a role in



the ability of the security forces to win the hearts and minds of the populace. It may also play a role in internationalizing the conflict.

While ethnicity is most likely the root of Malay separatism in southern Thailand, the likelihood, or lack thereof, for international terrorist group or government involvement should not be ignored. In recent years, the conflict has become more Islamist in nature.<sup>5</sup> Harish notes several potential reasons for this. He states that when Thailand attempted to categorize the Malay Muslims as Thai Muslims, Bangkok forced its Buddhist-centric definition of ethnicity on the Muslim population.<sup>6</sup> Further, as a result of the combined effects of Malaysia's lack of recent support for the insurgency, its cooperation with Thailand, and its support for ASEAN's policy of non-interference,<sup>7</sup> the Malay aspect of the conflict has taken a back seat to religion.<sup>8</sup> Another reason for the religious connotation of the insurgency is students traveling to the Middle East to receive an Islamic education.<sup>9</sup> Finally, Harish believes that viewing the conflict through the post-9/11 lens coupled with insurgents' choices to use key religious sites like the Kru-Ze mosque have given the conflict a stronger religious character.<sup>10</sup>

#### **D. LITERATURE REVIEW**

The recent episodes of violence in Thailand re-ignited in December of 2001, just three months after the infamous attacks in New York City and the Pentagon. The timing of the resurgence is most likely unrelated, but it has presented a convenient lens through which to view the struggle in southern Thailand. Most scholars recognize that the problem in southern Thailand now is a domestic struggle that has no international roots. However, international terrorist groups may see the struggle as an opportunity to wage jihad against a supporter of U.S. foreign policy. Studies on the issue have yielded two

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<sup>5</sup> S.P. Harish, "Changing Conflict Identities: The Case of the Southern Thailand Discord," Singapore: Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies Working Paper Number 107 (2006): 2.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>7</sup> Liow, "Security Situation," 539.

<sup>8</sup> Harish, "Changing Conflict Identities," 15.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

schools of thought relating to international terrorist involvement in the separatist movement: either foreign terrorists play no direct role in the conflict, or they are deeply involved. These schools originate from the scholars' basis of origin of the problem. If the insurgency tends to gain power through ethnicity more than religion, then international terrorist group involvement is less likely than if insurgency originates from religious fervor. Some of the authors who view Islam as the main source for the insurgency believe there are solid connections to international terror, but none of the authors who find the insurgency to be ethnically-based believe there is direct support from transnational terrorist groups. It is important to analyze the authors' train of thought because if recommendations that stem from each school are based on a misunderstood origin, they could provide adverse effects in trying to solve the problem.

### **1. Ethnic or Religious?**

The ethnic and religious differences in the southern provinces of Thailand are longstanding and have been the source of separatist fighting to some degree for decades. Differences in the culture of the Thai Buddhist society have clashed with the culture of Malay Muslims in policies of Thai Buddhist inclusion into Thailand. The importance of understanding the motivations of the conflict is to prescribe effective solutions to establish a secure environment in the separatist region.

To understand the root of the insurgency from ethnic and religious perspectives, it must be determined what parts of culture are ethnic, and which are religious. Harish identifies ethnic aspects as in language and education, while religious aspects are directly stated as either Islam or Buddhist.<sup>11</sup> I think this is an effective way to sort out the importance of both ethnicity and religion in analysis and determine the source of the fighters' motivation. Overlap will occur in the education aspect because of the religious nature of the *pondoks* of the region.

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<sup>11</sup> Harish, "Changing Conflict Identities," 2.

Many scholars thought ethnicity was the cause of the insurgency through the 1970s.<sup>12</sup> Since the rise of trans-national Islamist terrorism, authors have found a new framework to analyze the southern Thailand insurgency.<sup>13</sup> During the 1900s, and into the Thaksin regime in the early 2000s, there was a concerted effort by Bangkok to incorporate all people living within the borders of Thailand into the Thai culture. While there is still freedom for subjects to practice the religion of their choice, Thai authorities have attempted to change the Islamic way of dress and method of schooling in the south. Part of the changes in schooling involved learning the Thai language to prepare for the national exam. Another part of being a Thai subject is allegiance to the King, who is seen as part Buddhist God. This aspect is part of Thai culture, but many Malays view it as an affront to their Islamic religion. Also, Bangkok initiated a campaign to include all Muslims, not just the Malay Muslims in the south, into a category called “Thai Muslim.”<sup>14</sup> Along with these changes, Thai news reports of the violence increasingly refer to the insurgents by their Islamic religious affiliation rather than their ethnicity. A September 2011 attack in a prison described Muslim inmates attacking Buddhist assistant jailers.<sup>15</sup> A December 2011 attack describes the perpetrators on Yala as “two teenage men wearing Muslim caps.”<sup>16</sup> News reports rarely mention that insurgents are Malay. While these descriptions are accurate, they are not complete, as it is a valid assumption that Muslims in the three Southern regions are also Malay. These reports reflect how Thais frame the conflict, not necessarily how the insurgents view their struggle. In

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.; Nantawan Haemindra, “The Problem of the Thai-Muslims in the Four Southern Provinces of Thailand (Part 1),” *Journal of Southeast Asia Studies* 7:2 (1976): 197–225; Nantawan Haemindra, “The Problem of the Thai-Muslims in the Four Southern Provinces of Thailand (Part 2),” *Journal of Southeast Asia Studies* 8:1 (1977): 85–105.; Astri Suhrke, “Irredentism Contained: The Thai Muslim Case,” *Comparative Politics Comparative Politics* 7:2 (1975): 187–203; and Astri Suhrke, “Loyalists and Separatists,” 237–250.

<sup>13</sup> Chalk, “Separatism,” 242–243. See also Harish, “Changing Conflict Identities,” 1–2.

<sup>14</sup> Harish, “Changing Conflict Identities,” 10.

<sup>15</sup> “1 Buddhist Inmate Killed, 2 Others Injured in Pattani Prison Riot by Muslim Inmates,” *The Nation*, September 5, 2011. Accessed February 5, 2012.

<http://www.nationmultimedia.com/breakingnews/1-Buddhist-inmate-killed-2-others-injured-in-Pattani-30164512.html>.

<sup>16</sup> “Insurgents Launch New Attacks in South,” *The Nation*, December 14, 2011. Accessed March 21, 2012. <http://www.nationmultimedia.com/national/Insurgents-launch-new-attacks-in-South-30171822.html>.

efforts to change the culture of the region to incorporate the Thai Subjects into the borders, leaders in Bangkok have may re-characterized the conflict to a religious nature.

Most contemporary authors believe that the insurgency is taking on a religious context. McCargo states that insurgent leaders use religion as a common thread of motivation and recruitment of militants, but he is careful to distinguish the use of Islam from defining the conflict as Islamist.<sup>17</sup> Liow and Pathan use a similar argument to McCargo's that although religion is a motivation mechanism, it is also a long standing part of the Malay culture in the southern provinces and violence has not spread to Bangkok or even Phuket Province.<sup>18</sup> Liow has held this position since the most recent episode of violence began in 2004 when he stated that the violence in southern Thailand stems from "a range of social and political forces" involving both provincial leadership and government forces that "cannot be purely attributed to a phenomenon of Islamist violence and separatism."<sup>19</sup>

In contrast, there are two notable authors who believe that Islam is central to the root of the insurgency, and should be dealt with as such. Gunaratna, a noted expert on international terror, wrote in 2004 that the Islamic religion with local and political influence drove the separatist movement against Bangkok.<sup>20</sup> He states that the insurgency stems from ethnic and religious grievances the Muslim-Malay people in southern Thailand have against the government of Thailand through years of forced assimilation, poor administrative procedures, lack of knowledge and sensitivity of the populace, and the emplacement of economic disadvantages.<sup>21</sup> However, throughout the book, he refers to the people of the southern provinces as Muslim or Islamist.<sup>22</sup> Abuza also casts the problem in a religious light for the cause of the insurgency. He states that

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<sup>17</sup> Duncan McCargo, *Tearing Apart the Land: Islam and Legitimacy in Southern Thailand* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2008): 188.

<sup>18</sup> Joseph Chinyong Liow and Don Pathan, "Confronting Ghosts: Thailand's Shapeless Southern Insurgency," Lowry Institute for International Policy, Paper No. 30 (2010): 44–45.

<sup>19</sup> Liow, "Security Situation," 544.

<sup>20</sup> Gunaratna, Acharya, and Chua, *Conflict*, 9.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 10–15.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

while the problems of militancy in Southeast Asia were generally localized, leaders of these movements saw an opportunity to gain greater attention so as not to be seen as part of the “Islamic periphery,” causing militants to take a more hard-line Islamic stance.<sup>23</sup> In 2009, he stated, “the conflict in the south is more religious in nature than it ever has been.”<sup>24</sup> Abuza developed his opinion from interviews taken from former and current militants who state that leaders of the insurgency are using religion as a motivator.<sup>25</sup>

The origins of the southern Thai insurgency lie in the ethnic roots of the Malay people of the three southern provinces, and past analysis has described the conflict as such. In the past decade, however, both analysis of the insurgency and motivation for fighting have emphasized the importance of religion. Both parties of the argument recognize the importance of ethnicity and religion as key motivating factors, but applying a prescription for ending the militancy of the movement may be improperly managed if it is trying to solve the wrong problem.

## **2. Involvement of Foreign Elements**

A significant group of authors believes that the southern Thailand insurgency receives material support from foreign terrorists, while another influential group believes that there is limited and indirect support from foreign terrorists, if any, in the conflict. The use of tactics similar to those used in Iraq would lead one to believe that outside forces are involved due to the complexity of much of the bomb making, but the fact that the conflict has not spread outside of the four southern-most provinces may signify that the conflict remains a local struggle. It is important to determine if there are international terror ties to the conflict because a proper prescription for regional peace requires accurate intelligence regarding the true actors and supporters. If the conflict is a mainly local struggle, treating it with the assumption elements of Jemaah Islamiyah or Al Qaeda

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<sup>23</sup> Zachary Abuza, “Learning by Doing: Al Qaeda’s Allies in Southeast Asia,” *Current History*, 103:672 (2004): 171.

<sup>24</sup> Abuza, *Conspiracy*, 126.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid and Eliza Griswold, “Dispatches from Southern Thailand Entry 2: Fighting With Ghosts,” *Slate*, September 27, 2005. Accessed March 22, 2012.

[http://www.slate.com/articles/news\\_and\\_politics/dispatches/features/2005/dispatches\\_fromsouthern\\_thailand/fighting\\_with\\_ghosts.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/dispatches/features/2005/dispatches_fromsouthern_thailand/fighting_with_ghosts.html).

are active could lead to outside involvement from the United States, thus inviting international terrorists to the conflict. If international terrorists are involved, and the insurgency is dealt with as a localized problem, support may continue without the government's knowledge. In either case, the prospects for peace seem limited without knowing who is fighting and what their motives are.

One school of thought suggests that international terrorist organizations are not involved in materially supporting the southern Thai separatist movement. Scholars who subscribe to this belief realize that international terrorist groups like Al Qaeda and insurgent sympathizers in northern Malaysia train insurgent leaders, but these authors state that there is no evidence linking "outside terrorist groups" to the recent increase in violent activity.<sup>26</sup> Evidence of support from these authors typically focuses around ethnic Malay networks such as *pondoks*, soup kitchens, and training camps in northern Malaysia. Predictably, proponents of this view advocate change in Thai policies toward the region in order to end the violence; mainly, they propose a series of concessions to the afflicted Malay Muslims. Generally speaking, this group views the conflict as one of ethnic rather than religious strife, and therefore believes that there is little reason for international Islamic terrorist groups to provide direct support to the insurgents.

This school asserts that while international terrorist groups are nominally involved in the southern Thailand insurgency, the problem is ultimately domestic and calls for domestic solutions. These authors view the Islamic aspect of the Malay ethnicity as a significant factor to the continued violence but put much of the responsibility on the Thai government for failed policies. J. C. Liow, a leading author on the southern Thailand insurgency, states that while international assistance from Islamic states and organizations needs to be addressed, the main issue is that Thailand has created an environment for such activity to occur.<sup>27</sup> Yegar believes that any international involvement is minimal and strictly financial, thus not a determining factor in the continuation of violence.<sup>28</sup> He also believes that the responsibility for the continuation of

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<sup>26</sup> International Crisis Group, "Southern Thailand: The Impact of the Coup," Asia Report Number 129 (2007): 7.

<sup>27</sup> Liow, "Security Situation," 544.

<sup>28</sup> Yegar, *Between Integration*, 170.

violence lies in Thailand's lack of effective responsiveness in the region.<sup>29</sup> This school of thought believes that religion plays a major role in the conflict, but the impact of international terrorist groups plays far less of a role than local Thai policies.

In recent years, Thai and Malaysian security forces have collected data that point to a softer role of foreign influence in the southern Thailand insurgency. In their cooperation, they have found that elements in Malaysia are operating to provide sanctuary, logistical support and arms manufacturing, and financing.<sup>30</sup> Today, scholars estimate that nearly 800 individuals with connections to the conflict and over 100 insurgent leaders live somewhat permanently in Malaysia, but they are under surveillance by the Special Branch of the Royal Malaysian Police. Once these individuals act in a manner that could jeopardize Malaysia's official neutrality, the criminals are arrested and extradited to Thailand, as was the case with the "PULO Four" who were arrested in 1998 for conspiring to disrupt economic and diplomatic relations between Bangkok and Kuala Lumpur.<sup>31</sup> Additionally, in January of 2005, Thai authorities arrested Dorormae Kuteh, who established the Gerakan Mujahedeen Islam Patani (GMIP), by pressuring Malaysia for extradition.<sup>32</sup>

Trafficking of humans, weapons, and drugs across the porous Thai-Malaysia border is a primary concern for the Royal Thai Army and the Border Police in the area, but with the on-going insurgency, there is an increased alertness in trafficking, especially weapons and bomb-making materials. Pressure from Thai security forces has driven bomb makers out of the area, but they have fled to Malaysia as it is a more permissive environment for such illicit activities. However, this is not to say that Malaysia is officially neglecting to combat the problem. In December of 2009, locals tipped off the Kelantan Criminal Investigation Department to an IED supply cache in Pasir Mas,

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 137.

<sup>30</sup> Anthony Davis. "Borderline Support—Malaysia and Indonesia Aid Thai Insurgency." *Jane's Intelligence Review* (July 16, 2010): 4. Accessed November 14, 2011.  
[http://jtic.janes.com.libproxy.nps.edu/JDIC/JTIC/documentView.do?docId=/content1/janesdata/mags/jir/hi story/jir2010/jir10933.htm@current&pageSelected=allJanes&keyword=Borderline%20Support&backPath =http://jtic.janes.com/JDIC/JTIC/search&Prod\\_Name=&activeNav=/JDIC/JTIC](http://jtic.janes.com.libproxy.nps.edu/JDIC/JTIC/documentView.do?docId=/content1/janesdata/mags/jir/hi story/jir2010/jir10933.htm@current&pageSelected=allJanes&keyword=Borderline%20Support&backPath =http://jtic.janes.com/JDIC/JTIC/search&Prod_Name=&activeNav=/JDIC/JTIC).

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

approximately 10 km from the border. Thai intelligence believed there were four or five more such caches.<sup>33</sup> Malaysia is a more permissive environment for IED manufacture, but the government is not directly affected by the violence of the insurgency within its borders, causing scarce security resources to migrate elsewhere around Malaysia where decision makers believe they will yield better results. Still, Malaysia's efforts to combat these caches demonstrate that while there may be local sympathizers in the border region, Kuala Lumpur officially does not support the insurgency.

Another form of support from non-official agencies has been funding. Authorities have documented that shopkeepers and soup kitchens in Malaysia are providing funding for the insurgency in southern Thailand.<sup>34</sup> Davis believes that while it is difficult to estimate the amount of money funding the insurgency, it is likely a relatively small amount, due in part to skimming along the process.<sup>35</sup> Then-Prime Minister Surayud Chulanont's comments in 2007 that Malaysian soup kitchens were a major source of funding were probably false but absolutely angered the government in Kuala Lumpur.<sup>36</sup> Again, there is evidence that suggests Malaysians are providing support, but the official stance of Malaysia is noninterference.

The majority of the authors in the field believe that the insurgency is rooted in ethnicity, with religion being an important aspect of the problem. Since the insurgency is believed to be rooted in ethnic separatism, it seems unlikely the fighters would welcome help from transnational terrorists who could bring following eyes from much larger nations like the United States with them. However, if international terrorists are at work to support the insurgency, a prescription based on a lack of transnational terrorist involvement could be a waste.

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>34</sup> Davis "Borderline Support," 6; Dennis D. Gray and Vijay Joshi, "Thailand Insurgency Has Links to the Broader World of Radical Islam," *The Associated Press*, March 9, 2007; and Michael Vatikiotis, "Resolving International Conflicts in Southeast Asia: Domestic Challenges and Regional Perspectives," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 28:1 (2006): 36.

<sup>35</sup> Davis "Borderline Support," 6.

<sup>36</sup> Gray and Joshi, "Thailand Insurgency."



A drastically different view emphasizes the religious nature of the conflict in southern Thailand and argues that international terrorist support is highly integrated into many aspects of the southern Thai insurgency. This school argues that the violence must be reined in by controlling the international terrorist support. The main proponent for this view is Rohan Gunaratna in his book *Conflict and Terrorism in Southern Thailand*. Gunaratna has examined the situation in southern Thailand with a team of authors and determined that the basis of the conflict has shifted from ethnicity to religion since 2004 when the current round of violence began.<sup>37</sup> This line of thinking, as well as assuming international terrorist groups have a significant level of control over the insurgency, led Gunaratna to the conclusion that the first step in ending the insurgency is to disrupt the linkages between Thai insurgents and foreign terrorists.<sup>38</sup>

Gunaratna and Abuza are the prominent authors who believe this scenario represents reality. Many authors like Davis, Abuza, Gunaratna, and Chalk recognize that there is an international terrorist presence in southern Thailand, but Gunaratna and Abuza are the primary scholars who draw a clear connection to the unrest in southern Thailand to the presence of Al-Qaeda and Jemaah Islamiyah operatives in the region. Abuza's recent findings that international terrorist groups like Jemaah Islamiyah have been and are operating in the region conflict with his previous research that "there have never been strong ties to the Muslim insurgency in southern Thailand and international terrorist groups."<sup>39</sup> Abuza previously placed much of the blame on Thailand's lax immigration laws, involvement in weapons smuggling, and desire to become an international financial leader have led the nation to become a "nation of convenience" for Al-Qaeda.<sup>40</sup> Chalk tends to agree with Abuza's first position in this matter, that it seems that international terrorist groups may want to be active in the region, but Chalk states that the Malay Muslim movement wants nothing to do with international terror. From interviews from

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<sup>37</sup> Gunaratna, Acharya, and Chua, *Conflict*, 100.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 114.

<sup>39</sup> Abuza, *Conspiracy*, 147. See also Zachary Abuza, "Tentacles of Terror: Al Qaeda's Southeast Asian Network," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* Volume 24:3, (December 2002): 459.

<sup>40</sup> Abuza, "Tentacles of Terror," 460.

leaders of the insurgent movement, Chalk suggests that support from Jemaah Islamiyah is not wanted because they view the group as “bad news.”<sup>41</sup>

It seems that from this school of thought that there is a danger of believing that because international terrorists are present in Thailand that they are involved with the insurgency in the south. Most scholars believe this to be false, but a chance exists that it may be the case. It seems unlikely, though, for two main reasons. First, the conflict is extremely localized and has not spread to Western/American targets. Second, the CIA and other powerful intelligence agencies had been actively tracking international terrorists in Thailand since at least 1998 when the CIA warned of a Pakistani threat to American interests in Thailand.<sup>42</sup> With over a decade of intelligence collecting, there is still no hard proof that international terrorist groups are connected to the Malay Muslim insurgency. However, the importance of this argument is that it may give usable planning considerations as to how to combat the insurgency should Jemaah Islamiyah or Al-Qaeda be incorporated. It is also important for the problem of combating international terrorist funding and destroying safe havens, but as for solving the problem of today’s Malay Muslim insurgency, it has little value other than hypothetical planning.

While there is a debate on the involvement of international terrorist groups, there is little room for debate that there are international influences on the insurgency. One of the main forms of international support for the southern Thailand insurgency is through international schooling. Davis states that the Barisan Revolusi Nasional Coordinate (BRN-C) and the Islamic Association of University Students of Patani (Southern Thailand) in Indonesia (PMIPTI) are working together to assess and train recruits to fight in southern Thailand.<sup>43</sup> The Thai “students” that are sent to Indonesia are trained on military field craft and guerilla warfare. The BRN-C has also set up local training areas in Thailand’s secluded national parks conducting the same type training.<sup>44</sup> Training in

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<sup>41</sup> Peter Chalk and Carl Ungerer, *Neighbourhood Watch: The Evolving Terrorist Threat in Southeast Asia*, (Australia: Australian Strategic Policy, 2008), 31.

<sup>42</sup> Chalk, “Separatism” 246.

<sup>43</sup> Davis “Borderline Support,” 3.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

Indonesia sometimes took up to one year as Malay Muslims from Thailand reported to PMIPTI houses that provided cover that allowed the trainees not to be enrolled in academic studies. This cover-up allowed them an opportunity for full-time training.<sup>45</sup> PMIPTI is not an official arm of Jakarta, but it is another case where people from outside of Thailand are taking an expressed interest in the insurgency.

Scholars still believe that there are hard connections to Al-Qaeda and/or Jemaah Islamiyah. Sheridan believes that the timing of the 2004 “upsurge in violence...that is most suggestive of Jemaah Islamiyah and Al-Qaeda influence.”<sup>46</sup> He further states that while there probably is no connection of the insurgency to the two, it provides a lens to view the plight of the Malay Muslim. This statement is hardly asserting that there is a hard connection to Al-Qaeda and the southern insurgency. Paul Quaglia of PSA Asia believes that since the uptick in violence and coordination is unprecedented, it is likely that Jemaah Islamiyah or Al-Qaeda is facilitating the insurgency with funds or training.<sup>47</sup> Thai officials believe there is a connection but cannot offer hard proof.<sup>48</sup> While there may not be hard connections to international terrorist groups, in the post-9/11 world, these actors can provide an ideological rally point for the southern Thailand insurgents.

International terrorist support for the southern Thailand insurgency may seem a reasonable aspect of the fight given the post-9/11 lens and the documented presence of Jemaah Islamiyah actors in and around Thailand, but if they are not actively supportive, efforts to sever the supposed ties would be a waste of effort and/or alienate the populace of the three southern provinces affected by the violence. It is inherent that if the insurgency is to end that decision makers apply appropriate policies, and knowledge of the actors and their motivations is necessary. Government leaders must use caution not to apply more ineffective policies because the level of violence is as high as areas with international terrorist involvement.

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Sheridan, “Jihad Archipelago,” 77.

<sup>47</sup> Anthony Davis, “Thailand Confronts Separatist Violence in its Muslim South” *Jane’s Intelligence Review*, February 17, 2004. Accessed April 11, 2012. <http://articles.janes.com/articles/Janes-Intelligence-Review-2004/Thailand-confronts-separatist-violence-in-its-Muslim-south.html>.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

### **3. Conclusion**

The key difference in the literature concerns the relative importance of religious and ethnic differences. All analysts recognize that the Malays in southern Thailand are generally Muslim, but they differ over the role that Islam plays in motivating violent actions against Thai security forces and Thai civilians. While there had been some argument before September 2001 that the conflict was religiously based, most of the literature that makes this assumption was written and published after 2001. I believe the reason more analysts have come to this conclusion is that in today's security environment, there is a convenient framework of extremist Islamic terror that can be easily molded to fit the conflict in southern Thailand. While their conclusions may be true, it seems bold to neglect 600 years of ethnic strife. It may be that boldness that frames the problem to find solutions that minimize or end any foreign support for the insurgency to facilitate peace.

Determining the presence of international terrorist groups in the southern Thailand insurgency is critical to bringing peace to the region because policy makers must know who they are fighting and what motivates them to continue. It is also important to distinguish between the members of Al Qaeda, Jemaah Islamiyah, or other terrorist groups that may be using Thailand because of its permissive environment for various criminal activities and the militants in the south. The presence of these international terrorists within the borders of Thailand does not necessarily draw the conclusion that they are aiding the southern fighter. It is unlikely that international terrorist directly support efforts in the south, but southern militants have gone to train overseas. Policy makers need a clear understanding of how international organizations support the insurgency to prescribe effective operations to the region, and influence policy makers in Indonesia and Malaysia.

### **E. METHODS AND SOURCES**

This thesis is a case study that examines the southern Thailand insurgency in order to provide policy recommendations that could prove useful once the cause of the insurgency is determined. In this current state of world affairs, this insurgency is unique

and holds a value that other insurgencies do not. The southern Thailand conflict has been ongoing since the 1800s and continues until this day. The analytical approach of a case study affords the opportunity to refine a school of thought that an insurgency comprised of Muslim fighters does not necessarily mean that it is a Muslim insurgency. Because most of the problem with the policies involving the insurgency stem from the debate regarding the origin of the violence, secondary sources comprise most of the references of this thesis.

Chapter II of this thesis examines the importance of ethnicity and religion in the southern Thailand insurgency over its long history. Chapter III discusses the presence or absence of foreign terrorist involvement in the four provinces. The thesis concludes with recommendations for Thai and Malaysian policy in the region to resolve the violent situation. The conclusion brings ethnic and religious concerns together and formulates policy recommendations based on the current or future prospects of international terrorist group involvement.

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## II. CULTURAL OR RELIGIOUS?

The cause and motivation of the insurgency is one of the key aspects to solving the problem. There is a conflict in the literature on the subject regarding whether the insurgency stems from an ethnic or religious source. While both parties recognize the other factor plays an important part in driving the violence, it is important to apply solutions that will affect the true motivation of the militants. This chapter shows that while the insurgency began as mainly an ethno-political struggle by the Malay Muslims, it has taken on a more religious connotation, due in no small part to the Thai government's actions of assimilation and a failed execution of counter-insurgency. There are four main factors of the shift to an Islamic identity of the insurgency comprised of Thai policies of assimilation, diminishing Malaysian support, Middle Eastern education of southern Thais, and the reality of the Global War on Terror.<sup>49</sup> These factors contributed to a generational shift in motivation noticed by a former Barisan Revolusi Nasional leader from state separatism to religious fervor.<sup>50</sup> The problem in the south should be attacked with the understanding that the new generation has religious motivation and identity, though the focus is still mainly ethnically separatist. This chapter describes each of these four factors in relation to the shift and concludes with implications of the different perspectives on the issue of origin and motivation.

### A. HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF ISLAM IN SOUTHERN THAILAND

Malay Muslims' desire for independence and autonomy in southern Thailand has a history almost as long as Islam has in the region. It is not known exactly when Islam was introduced into what is now southern Thailand, but it was potentially as early as the 1300s. The settlements began when Arab and Persian traders used ports in the Malay Peninsula and the Indonesian Archipelago along their trading routes with China. When

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<sup>49</sup> Harish, "Changing Conflict Identities," 15–16.

<sup>50</sup> Eliza Griswold, "Dispatches from Southern Thailand Entry 2: Fighting With Ghosts," *Slate*, September 27, 2005. Accessed March 22, 2012.  
[http://www.slate.com/articles/news\\_and\\_politics/dispatches/features/2005/dispatches\\_fromsouthern\\_thailand/fighting\\_with\\_ghosts.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/dispatches/features/2005/dispatches_fromsouthern_thailand/fighting_with_ghosts.html)

traders married local women and raised children as Muslims, the seeds of Islam had been sown in the Patani region. In 1457, the Patani Kingdom was established as an Islamic state, even though the local brand of Islam in the region incorporated animistic and Hindu beliefs.<sup>51</sup> The Kingdom of Patani should not be confused with the Thai Province of Pattani. According to McCargo, Patani “alludes to an older and larger area, and may carry Malay nationalist connotations.”<sup>52</sup> He explains that Patani is the former Islamic kingdom, while Pattani is the name of the Thai province in the region Patani once existed. The presence or absence of one “t” can cause quite different feelings in the people in the southern border provinces of Thailand.

While the Sultanate of Patani was growing in prominence, the Kingdom of Siam was expanding southward into the neighboring Songkhla region. The Siamese rulers began to exert control over Malay sultans through tribute, conscription, and the ability to veto new sultans if the predecessor died. When the Siamese kings were powerful, Malay sultans were amiable in paying tribute, but they were more likely to disregard such payments when the Kingdom was weak. It is arguable how much control Siam exerted over the Malay sultans, but scholars believe that there was considerable desire to be rid of Siamese (later Thai) control as early as the late 1400s.<sup>53</sup>

The Malays from Patani and the Siamese Kingdom went through a series of struggles as Siam gained and lost power. Siam was able to continue exerting control southwards when Patani was captured by the Portuguese in 1511. Even though the newly acquired sultanates of Patani, Kedah, Terengganu, and Kelantan operated with a great deal of autonomy, revolts against Siam began in the 1600s and continued into the 1700s. Siam signed a treaty with Portugal that allowed for the use of Patani as an intermediary trade city for trade with China and Japan. This agreement made Patani a central trade hub between Malacca and China for approximately 150 years. Siam maintained control of the region as the Portuguese, British, and French were indifferent to the situation. After Siam was defeated by Burma in 1767, Patani had an opportunity to gain

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<sup>51</sup> Yegar, *Between Integration*, 73–74.

<sup>52</sup> McCargo, *Tearing Apart the Land*, 1.

<sup>53</sup> Yegar, *Between Integration*, 74.



independence, but King Rama I quickly rebuilt military power after the war of 1785 and moved into Patani to reassert control. This move only served to strengthen the resolve of the sultanates from 1789 to 1791, resulting in the reconquering of Patani after an 1808 uprising. Siam divided the region into seven small districts that were nominally autonomous while heavily controlled by a Siamese governor living in Songkhla. Rebellions broke out in 1832 and 1838, causing Siam to reassert authority and reduce the power of the Malay districts. While Patani districts were under heavy Siamese control, they were still afforded the opportunity to enact laws, collect taxes and oversee the day-to-day government operations as they saw fit. This quasi-autonomy continued until the British began exerting power northward from Malaya.<sup>54</sup>

In the 1800s, the British were concerned with maintaining peace and order in the region to protect their interests. The Anglo-Siamese treaty of 1897 ensured Siam's sovereignty over Kelantan and Terengganu and British exclusivity in the Malay Peninsula. Britain believed that Siam was incapable of protecting its interests in the northern Malaya/southern Siam region and began attempting to undermine Siamese rule in the region to gain more influence. To combat this attempt, Siam conducted a large-scale overhaul of governance in the region beginning in 1892. Siamese governors replaced Malay rulers. The payment of tribute ended, and the Siamese established a formal tax structure. The seven semi-autonomous regions were reconsolidated and placed under a Siamese governor's oversight that was directly responsible to the Siamese Department of the Interior. *Sharia* law in official business ended, but the Malays were still allowed the practice in personal affairs. Siamese authorities restricted Malay Muslim judges from actively sitting in courts. They were relegated to advisory duties. These actions angered the sultanates, especially the sultans of Patani and Kelantan. A new round of British treaties undermined the ability of the Malay states to revolt by presenting a compelling case for Siam to sign treaties with Kelantan and Terengganu. The treaty did not include Patani, diplomatically alienating the sultanate from the others that were now

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<sup>54</sup> Yegar, *Between Integration*, 75–76.

effectively under British Protectorate status. The British seemed to have little concern over the fate of Patani as anti-Siamese sentiment continued to rise.<sup>55</sup>

The Anglo-Siamese Treaty of 1909 set the border between what is now Malaysia and Thailand.<sup>56</sup> The separation included into Siam what are now the districts of Pattani, Narathiwat, and Yala. The British maintained influence over Kelantan, Terengganu, Kedah, and Perlis and gave up extra-territorial privileges with Siam. While the level of control by Thai-speaking officials in the border provinces was arguably negligible, the creation of an administrative border between the Malays of Siam and British Malaya firmed bitterness toward the Siam state.<sup>57</sup>

Once Britain recognized the Southern Siam border states as Siamese, efforts began to implement policies to bring the Malay Muslims under the scope of the Siamese-Buddhist state. In 1921, one of the first moves made was to close down traditional *pondok* schools and force children into national schools with instruction in Thai.<sup>58</sup> This policy led to uprisings due to the perception that Siam was attempting to downgrade the role of the religion of Islam and the Malay culture. Uprisings in 1922 and 1923 caused the Siamese government to scale back on these policies, partly due to support the southern provinces received from nationalist sympathizers in northern Malaya.<sup>59</sup> The 1932 revolution that was based on a Thai nationalism again attempted to draw in ethnic minorities into the Thai nation, but it was met with resistance in the south. Two major points of contention at this time were an attempt to classify the Malay Muslims as Thai Muslims and the replacing of Muslim administrators with Thai officials.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 77–79.

<sup>56</sup> Liow, “Security Situation,” 533.

<sup>57</sup> Yegar, *Between Integration*, 79.

<sup>58</sup> Liow, “Security Situation” 533.

<sup>59</sup> Yegar, *Between Integration*, 88.

<sup>60</sup> Liow, “Security Situation” 534.

## **B. SHIFT FROM ETHNIC TO RELIGIOUS FOCUS**

Since the end of World War II, factors existed to shift the focus of the fighting from ethnic to religious. There are four main reasons for this shift, some of which the Thai government had control over in some degree, and others they have not. These main reasons are Thai assimilation policies, a lack of official support from Malaysia to the militants, students becoming more educated in Islamic issues abroad, and a general fear of the global spread of terrorism after 9/11.<sup>61</sup>

### **1. Post-World War II Assimilation Policies**

Separatist sentiment continued during and after World War II, during which Thailand was an ally to Japan, mainly due to the assimilation aspirations of former Field Marshall, then Prime Minister Pibul Songkhram who came to power in December 1938. His assignment to the new office sparked another round of violence and separatism. Six months later, he changed the country's name from Siam to Thailand.<sup>62</sup> The new regime passed decrees that banned traditional Muslim clothing. Offenders, especially high ranking officials, were subject to fines or police beatings.<sup>63</sup> The alliance with Japan, therefore, against Britain, allowed Thailand to regain possession of Kelantan, Terengganu, Kedah, and Perlis, along with other provinces formerly belonging to Laos, Cambodia, and Burma. This takeover further fueled the flames of separatism and strengthened Southern Thailand Muslim's ties with their neighbors in Malaya.<sup>64</sup> The fall of Japan brought about the fall of Pibul and ushered in the reign of Pridi. He brought a new strategy that dissolved forced assimilation but utilized government oversight into the Islamic dealings. Royal decrees in 1947 and 1948 called for additions to the Patronage of Islam Act that provided supervision and supported Islamic functionaries.<sup>65</sup> A major step towards including Malay Muslims in the Thai government was the addition of the *Chularajamontri*, considered a spiritual leader for all Muslims in Thailand. The king

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<sup>61</sup> Harish, "Changing Conflict Identities," 15–16.

<sup>62</sup> Yegar, *Between Integration*, 90.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 91.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 93.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 95.

appointed the *Chularajamontri* who was to serve as his advisor on all matters Islam.<sup>66</sup> The movement towards Muslim advisors for Thai government officials took hold in the southern provinces, and the separatist movement quieted, although there were still numerous Malay Muslims who refused to obey edicts from the *Chularajamontri*.<sup>67</sup> The settling was only temporary as post-war Malays had a new-found sense of nationalism and militants began training in Malaya.<sup>68</sup> Pridi was ousted in 1948, and Thailand and the Malay Muslims found themselves under the rule and harsh policies of Pibul once again.<sup>69</sup>

Strong separatist sentiment continued through the 1970s and began to cool down during the Prem and Chatichai governments took control. During their terms, both leaders made genuine efforts to assimilate the Malay Muslims into the Thai bureaucratic system while maintaining Malay identity. These regimes fostered the establishment of the Southern Border Provincial Administration Center (SBPAC) in 1981, attempted development of the local economy, and the democratization of Thai politics.<sup>70</sup> The SBPAC's stated goal was to educate Thais on the culture of the Malay Muslims, and it also served as an official link from the border provinces to Bangkok.<sup>71</sup> The Thai capital attempted to revitalize the economy of the southern provinces with tourism and entertainment (sectors in which Thailand arguably has a comparative advantage), but the effort was met with strong resistance due to conflicts with Muslim beliefs and a perception that Bangkok would fill key positions with Thais.<sup>72</sup> The democratization of Thai politics allowed for direct representation from the southern provinces via the Democrat Party and New Aspiration Party.<sup>73</sup> While these policies were not perfect,

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Yegar, *Between Integration*, 96–97.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>70</sup> Liow, "Security Situation," 535.

<sup>71</sup> Joseph Chinyong Liow, "Bangkok's Southern Discomfort: Violence and Response in Southern Thailand," *IDSS Commentaries* (2004): 2–3.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>73</sup> Liow, "Security Situation," 535.

partly due to the Army's heavy hand in the democratic process and misguided economic development plans, they did co-opt the Malay elites and kept violence down for two decades.<sup>74</sup>

Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, a former police officer, came to power through the efforts of the now-banned Thai Rak Thai (Thais Love Thais) Party in 2001 and implemented his own assimilation policies with a mix of heavy-handed operations. The current rounds of the separatist movement began in December 2001 when five police officers were killed in attacks on five police posts in Pattani, Yala, and Narathiwat.<sup>75</sup> In May of 2002, Thaksin abolished the SBPAC and initiated martial law in the region.<sup>76</sup> The move towards martial law was an attempt to gain power in the border provinces for his own political machine, but he effectively dismantled the Malay system that held the region relatively peaceful since the 1980s.<sup>77</sup> Thaksin and his advisors witnessed the up-tick in violence, but the arrogance of the regime concluded that the spike was due to criminal thuggery.<sup>78</sup> In 2004, when coordinated attacks began, they began believing otherwise. 2004 is considered the beginning of the most recent attacks that got the attention of terrorism expert like Gunaratna and Abuza. It is also the point where more authors begin citing religion more as the cause for the insurgency. This section describes how Thaksin's policies helped to cause the latest decade-long episode of violence and how his administration and those following him gave the insurgents more reason to rally around Islam for motivation.

*a. Thaksin's Martial Law in the Southern Provinces*

By January 8, 2004, Thaksin had placed the provinces of Yala, Narathiwat, and Pattani under martial law.<sup>79</sup> The declaration followed the January 4

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<sup>74</sup> McCargo, *Tearing Apart the Land*, 2.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., xxiii.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 9. See also Liow, "Bangkok's Southern Discomfort," 3.

<sup>77</sup> McCargo, *Tearing Apart the Land*, 8.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Frank Bures, "Southern Thailand Under Martial Law." *Seattle Times* January 8, 2004. Accessed March 3, 2011. [http://seattletimes.nwsources.com/html/nationworld/200183215\\_thai08.html](http://seattletimes.nwsources.com/html/nationworld/200183215_thai08.html)

attacks in Narathiwat Province that burned 20 schools and blocked roads as diversionary tactics for the main objective to raid the Joh-Ai-Rong Army Base, resulting in approximately 100 stolen assault rifles.<sup>80</sup> Thaksin blamed the attack on culprits who were “mainly involved with crime, arms smuggling, and narcotics” traveling between Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia.<sup>81</sup> Defense Minister Thamarak Isaragura made a conflicting statement in an interview with a private radio station. He stated that the militants may have been attempting to persuade international terrorist groups to support their efforts.<sup>82</sup> Most analysts would view a decisive response by a state leader to such a dramatic attack as rational, especially since the area had been experiencing significant violence since 2001. Thaksin, however, took a particularly harsh approach, further alienating the Malay Muslims from the Thai state. At this point, defense leaders are beginning to voice their opinions that there could be more to the movement than ordinary crime.

As martial law continued, so did the violence. On April 28, 2004, militants attacked 12 different locations in Pattani, Narathiwat, and Yala provinces, resulting in 105 dead attackers. Some attackers were lightly armed while others were unarmed. Still, they continued to attack security strongholds.<sup>83</sup> The final standoff for the day happened at Kru-Ze mosque in Pattani where 32 militants were killed inside the mosque.<sup>84</sup> The attackers entered the mosque and continued firing, resulting in Thai security forces attacking the perpetrators who were seeking refuge inside the mosque. McCargo interviewed military officers involved in the incident, and all believed that they were fulfilling their basic duty as soldiers by neutralizing the militants inside the Kru-Ze mosque.<sup>85</sup> Thaksin again connected the attacks to drug addicts and claimed victory.<sup>86</sup> While April 28, 2004, could be considered a tactical success that ended in many militants

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<sup>80</sup> McCargo, *Tearing Apart the Land*, 153.

<sup>81</sup> Bures, “Southern Thailand Under Martial Law.”

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> McCargo, *Tearing Apart the Land*, 193.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 140–141.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 108.

<sup>86</sup> Liow, “Bangkok’s Southern Discomfort,” 2.

removed from the streets through either death or arrests, it is clear that Bangkok suffered a strategic loss by attacking one of the most holy structures for Southeast Asian Muslims. This act was a major contributing factor to the insurgency moving from an ethnic base to a religious base due to the gravity of attacking one of, if not the most, important Muslim holy sites in the ancient Patani region.

The trend of strategic failure saw another landmark event on October 25, 2004, in what is commonly referred to as the Tak Bai Incident. Approximately 1500 protestors demanded the release of security volunteers they felt had been wrongfully imprisoned.<sup>87</sup> Seventy-eight people died, mostly due to suffocation after more than 1000 arrested protestors were packed in to trucks for transportation to military camps.<sup>88</sup> This incident created local and global outrage, especially among Muslim groups. It was nothing but a strategic failure.

Martial law in the southern provinces was counterproductive. Violence increased during the period of martial law. In order to achieve a level of stability, Liow recommended that Thaksin should have reduced overt military presence and improved intelligence gathering and communication with key Muslim leaders.<sup>89</sup> While these attacks and protests certainly had a religious connotation, it was ultimately a general lack of concern for the humanity of the people that caused the violence to continue.

***b. Thaksin's Punishment of Neighborhoods Supporting Insurgency: Red, Yellow, and Green Zones***

One of the potential reasons the separatist movement still exists in southern Thailand is because the Malay-Muslims have been treated in a heavy-handed manner. Thaksin's police background manifested itself when in 2005 he pursued the red, yellow, and green classification of neighborhoods for providing economic benefit to the friendly neighborhoods. In this program, designed specifically to end the insurgency, if there was little crime and the populace cooperated with authorities, the village was

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<sup>87</sup> S.P. Harish, "Ethnic or Religious Cleavage? Investigating the Nature of the Conflict in Southern Thailand." *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, 28:1 (2006): 60.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Liow, "Bangkok's Southern Discomfort," 3.

designated “green” and received full developmental assistance and monetary aid. Conversely, “red” villages where violence was prevalent and cooperation was less than enthusiastic received no state developmental assistance. The result of the program was that the people became further disenchanted with the government in Bangkok and may have converted to militancy.<sup>90</sup> Programs like these, as well as excessive police force, must end if the Thai government wishes to develop a legitimate reputation to win the hearts and minds of the people it wishes to make productive Thai citizens.

It is important to consider the effectiveness of a policy such as neighborhood zoning that seeks to punish perceived government separatists. While there was a policy of zoning neighborhoods, there was no connection to budgets and zones.<sup>91</sup> Thaksin made public comments that neighborhood zones should be tied to budgets so that “red” zones would not receive government funds due to their lack of compliance, but in reality, this plan was never implemented.<sup>92</sup> Certainly Thaksin’s words could be used as a rallying point for separatists, but since the plan was not executed, it is irrelevant to draw any conclusions as to its effects. The perception that Thaksin would believe that such a plan would aid in the pacification of Malay-Muslims in the south is an important testament to his general belief that security forces should deal with the violence in a heavy-handed manner.

In sum, Thaksin’s rule created an environment that was stricken with violence and further drove the rift between the Thais and Malays apart. His heavy-handed tactics and misguided intelligence about the root causes of the attacks only built resentment for the Thai state. The abolishment of the SBPAC is further evidence that Thaksin had no real intentions of connecting with the Malay Muslim populace. He continued publicly to blame Malaysia and Indonesia for aiding the insurgency, which harmed relations and potential for cooperation. At least publicly, Thaksin did not believe that the insurgency was based in ethnic or religious terms, though members of his

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<sup>90</sup> Gunaratna, Acharya, and Chua, *Conflict*, 89–90.

<sup>91</sup> Michael Connors, “War on Error and the Southern Fire: How Terrorism Analysts Get it Wrong,” *Critical Asian Studies* 38:1 (2006): 170.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*



Ministry of defense believed it was potentially religious in nature.<sup>93</sup> His lack of understanding of the root of the insurgency set efforts to calm the region back decades and resulted in violence that continues today.

## **2. Lack of Support from Malaysia**

Since the late 1400s, when the struggle for autonomy from Siam began, leaders have been able to use ethnicity as an underlying cause to for separatism. Later in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, however, Malaysia has taken a stance that it will not interfere in the insurgency and pledged to aid Thailand in apprehending suspects in an effort to stabilize the region economically.<sup>94</sup> The cooperation yielded some success when in 1998, 900 militants surrendered and agreed to enter a government-led rehabilitation program.<sup>95</sup> After four months of intense violence, Prime Minister Thaksin was willing to grant amnesty to militants who had been charged before the 4 January coordinated attack on a Royal Thai Army post and arson of 20 schools.<sup>96</sup> The consideration of granting amnesty was due large part to the previous success joint Thai-Malaysian operations yielded.<sup>97</sup> It appears that the only formal support the insurgents received from Malaysia is from the Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS), which publicly stated that they offered moral support, but nothing more.<sup>98</sup> This link is most likely because the PAS is the opposition party from Perak, Perlis, and Kedah Provinces which border southern Thailand and hold a constituency that is generally supportive of the insurgents in southern Thailand.<sup>99</sup> However, PAS is an opposition party without enough power to change the official stance of the insurgency in Kuala Lumpur. Without official support from the country with which the militants share ethnic ties, the argument loses its justification.

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<sup>93</sup> Bures, "Southern Thailand Under Martial Law."

<sup>94</sup> Liow, "Security Situation," 541.

<sup>95</sup> "Southern Rebels Meet Deadline to Surrender," *Bangkok Post*, March 10, 1998.

<sup>96</sup> "Southern Unrest: Government Set to Make Policy U-Turn" *The Nation* April 6, 2004

<sup>97</sup> Liow, "Security Situation," 541.

<sup>98</sup> Abuza, *Conspiracy*, 225–226.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 225. See also Harish, "Changing Conflict Identities," 15.

Even though there is certainly moral support and probably material support from the people in northern Malaysia, the lack of official support from Kuala Lumpur helps to debase the argument for secession based on ethnic grounds. There have certainly been attacks in the past on the ethnicity and culture of the Malay Muslims, but at this point, a lack of Malaysian support serves to confine the problem within the borders of Thailand, instead of open it to ethnic borders. There is little the Malay Muslims of southern Thailand can do to garner support from the policy makers in Kuala Lumpur to back them either ethnically or religiously, as Kuala Lumpur views the situation as an internal Thai problem. The lack of support from Malaysia helps to explain the shift from ethnic motivation to religious motivation.

### **3. Students More Schooled in Islam**

The two ways students are becoming more educated through Islam are through local *pondoks* and by traveling to the Middle East. In an interview with a former BRN-C company commander, Liow and Pathan found that Islam had become a key motivator and uniting element for the new generation of fighters. He also noted that the *pondok* are environments to observe young school children growing up and decide if they are pious enough to join the movement. The BRN-C operative went on to say that his group uses religion as a “higher cause towards the liberation of our land and our people.”<sup>100</sup> These *pondoks* the BRN-C member spoke of are small, typically all-male, schools generally focused on religious teachings and building moral character. While they yield results producing pious Muslim men, they do a poor job teaching them vocational skills.<sup>101</sup> It seems natural that an insurgent group leader would look here for recruits because they can leverage religious motivation on young men who lack workplace skills necessary to succeed in the job market.

In 1961, Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat implemented a plan to promote the quality of education that students received through the *Pondok* Educational Improvement

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<sup>100</sup> Liow and Pathan, “Confronting Ghosts,” 38.

<sup>101</sup> McCargo *Tearing Apart the Land*, 37–38.

Program.<sup>102</sup> While the Thai government was able to standardize the educational process in the *pondoks* to some extent, the transformation upset the leaders of the *pondoks* as well as the traditional system of establishing the Malay-Muslims elites.<sup>103</sup> The result was deterioration of the quality of schools in Pattani.<sup>104</sup> Because students and their parents still sought quality Islamic education, many travelled to the Middle East.<sup>105</sup> These students came back to the *pondoks* to teach, but because their degrees were from countries like Egypt and Saudi Arabia, they were not allowed to be administrators of the *pondoks*. Instead, these highly educated men had close, direct contact with generally poor, impressionable teenagers each day. Even though they were not allowed leadership positions in the *pondoks*, they still had considerable status in society, giving their words sufficient weight and providing an opportunity for a radical teacher to engrain his views of the region in potential fighters' minds.<sup>106</sup> A Middle Eastern educational exodus played a part in the shift from ethnic to religious focus in the insurgency.

#### 4. Fear of the Spread of Global Terrorism

Besides the Thai government classifying the conflict along religious lines through assimilation policies and interference in schooling, authors have also introduced a shading of religiousness into the conflict under the pretence of involvement of international terrorist groups in the conflict. Since the attacks on 9/11, there has been an initial tendency to group Muslim terrorists into a group that threatens Western and/or U.S. interests. Several authors have drawn strong connections to the fighters in southern Thailand to the international terrorist group Jemaah Islamiyah and other groups in

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<sup>102</sup> Harish, "Changing Conflict Identities," 11.

<sup>103</sup> Uhani Dulyakasem, "Education and Ethnic Nationalism: The Case of the Muslim-Malays in Southern Thailand." In *Reshaping Local Worlds: Formal Education and Cultural Change in Rural Southeast Asia*, edited by Charles F. Keyes, (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, 1991), 146. See also Surin Pitsuwan, "Islam and Malay Nationalism: A Case Study of the Malay Muslims of Southern Thailand." PhD diss., Harvard University, 1982, 194.

<sup>104</sup> Joseph Chinyong Liow, "Islamic Education in Thailand: Negotiating Islam, Identity and Modernarity," *Southeast Asian Education Survey* (2005): 128.

<sup>105</sup> Hasan Madarn, *The Pondok and Madrasah in Patani* (Malaysia: Penerbit Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 2002), 80–83.

<sup>106</sup> McCargo, *Tearing Apart the Land*, 42–43.

Southeast Asia.<sup>107</sup> Jemaah Islamiyah's stated goal of global jihad has brought a religious connotation to the discussion if an author believes that the group is connected to the southern Thailand insurgency. During the Kru-Ze incident in April 2004 when the insurgents first attacked security personnel then sought refuge in the Kru-Ze mosque before they were attacked by security forces, some of the bodies had religious teachings on them after the attack.<sup>108</sup> The scale and method of this attack led some authors to believe that jihad had begun in the region.<sup>109</sup> Of course, the fact that the insurgents chose the historic mosque as the place for their final stand demonstrates the religious nature of the conflict. With these elements, analysts in the post-9/11 era have assumed that the conflict is religious in nature.

Not only are some prominent authors focusing on the religious essence of the conflict, but newspapers also tend to focus on the religious element.<sup>110</sup> The information contained in newspaper reports is critical because many more people read these than read the works scholars and experts of the region. Newspapers have long been an efficient way to spread information. The focus that Thai newspapers now have on religion shape the way Thai and world citizens view the conflict. While they may be an accurate description, I believe they have not been complete by leaving out the ethnic element. In the post-9/11 world, it is easy and convenient to group any Muslim insurgents into the group of global jihadis even if the history of the region would lead to a different conclusion.

## C. CONCLUSION

The conflict in southern Thailand began as an ethnic, separatist movement, with Islam being a central part of the ethnicity of the Malays in the area. Once the British drew and recognized the border in 1909, it impeded the lives of Malays living on separate sides of the border. After assimilation policies began in 1921 with the restructuring of

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<sup>107</sup> Gunaratna, Acharya, and Chua, *Conflict*, 59–62; See also Abuza, *Conspiracy*, 159–161.

<sup>108</sup> Gunaratna, Acharya, and Chua, *Conflict*, 26.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>110</sup> "1 Buddhist Inmate Killed, 2 Others Injured in Pattani Prison Riot by Muslim Inmates," *The Nation*, September 5, 2011. See also "Insurgents Launch New Attacks in South," *The Nation*, December 14, 2011.

the *pondoks*, Malay Muslims began to take serious issue with the Siamese state. Thai policies included other forms of assimilation tactics, but there remained attempts at religious accommodation at the highest levels of the Thai government until Thaksin assumed leadership. At that point, cooperation with Malay Muslim leaders all but ceased. It is at this point that most authors also believe that the insurgency began taking on religious tones.

The fighting took on an Islamic religious current primarily due to four main factors. These include Thai policies of assimilation, diminishing Malaysian support, growing Middle Eastern education of southern Thais, and finally the impact of the Global War on Terror.<sup>111</sup> These factors contributed to a generational shift in motivation noticed by a former Barisan Revolusi Nasional leader from state separatism to religious fervor.<sup>112</sup> The argument now is not whether the insurgency has become more Islamist, but how Islamist it has become.

In the effort to end the insurgency and bring peace to the region, it is important to determine both the origins of the insurgency and its current state. If policy makers, or even soldiers and police on the ground, do not understand that this is a separatist movement that has taken on religious motivation, they are unlikely to combat it effectively. When leaders execute policies designed to take on a strictly religious opponent that leave out the ethnic, separatist side of the motivation, an opportunity is lost to address all of the concerns of the people. The situation is likewise if leaders fail to address religious concerns of the Malay Muslims. Joll, however, argues that there is little value in determining if it is mainly religious in nature. He states that the religious element comes from the interconnectedness and communication structure of the Malay Muslim community, which is naturally present.<sup>113</sup> It is important for the security leaders to understand how the movement came to be religiously motivated and understand that it has shifted over the last decade. The importance lies in the fact that each security official

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<sup>111</sup> Harish, "Changing Conflict Identities," 15–16.

<sup>112</sup> Griswold "Fighting With Ghosts."

<sup>113</sup> Christopher M. Joll, "Religion and Conflict in Southern Thailand: Beyond Rounding Up the Usual Suspects," *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 32:2 (2010): 273–274.

who interacts with the populace must know the origins and motivation of the fighting. When the lowest level operators understand the ethnic and religious sides of the fighting, they have the chance to seize the opportunity to affect the support base of the insurgency, the people. Additionally, since the motives of the insurgency have become more Islamist, it is likely a more permissive environment to invite international terrorist groups to the fight.

In the southern Thailand insurgency, both ethnicity and religion have a great deal of importance. While there is still a connection to the ethnic, separatist sentiments of the past, the insurgents have begun to elevate the importance of religion to support “solidarity against the infidel Thai state.”<sup>114</sup> Harish believes such motivations have come from an insurgent leadership more schooled in Islam, failed Thai assimilation policies, a lack of official support from Malaysia, and the implications of the Global War on Terror.<sup>115</sup> Given the context of the fighting today, it seems convenient to place a large emphasis on religion in the fighting.

Religion is certainly a motivating factor, but demands are still ethnic, separatist, and political. Askew states that the goals are often not clear as the leadership and structure is also obscure.<sup>116</sup> Nonetheless, many of the attacks are against security forces, government officials, and teachers, be they Buddhist or Muslim. The underlying theme in the targeting is that the victims typically work for the Thai government at some level.<sup>117</sup> Leaders are using religion to motivate fighters and incite instability, but religion is simply the backbone of the network of connections between the Malay Muslims.<sup>118</sup> The struggle remains ethnic at its core, and this can be seen in who the insurgency targets for the purpose of intimidating government officials.

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<sup>114</sup> Marc Askew, “Insurgency and the Market for Violence in Southern Thailand ‘Neither War Nor Peace,’” *Asian Survey* 50:6 (2010): 1113.

<sup>115</sup> Harish, “Changing Conflict Identities,” 15–16.

<sup>116</sup> Askew, “Insurgency and the Market for Violence,” 1134.

<sup>117</sup> Abuza, *Conspiracy*, 72–73.

<sup>118</sup> Joll, “Religion and Conflict,” 273–274.

If the southern Thailand insurgency turned into a truly religious struggle, motivation would exist for Thai insurgents to request assistance from international terrorist groups. Since the struggle remains based on ethnic separatism, there is limited potential of such involvement. The following chapter discusses the involvement of international terrorism in southern Thailand and concludes that there is minimal involvement. One of the primary reasons is the ideological difference between a separatist movement and global jihad.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Abuza, *Conspiracy*, 159; Gunaratna, Acharya, and Chua, *Conflict*, 63; and Liow and Pathan, “Confronting Ghosts,” 71–72.

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### III. INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT

International support for the southern Thailand insurgency has come from two major sources. The first source is international terrorist groups, and the second source is sympathetic Malaysians living just across the border. The most dangerous of these is from international terrorist groups like Jemaah Islamiyah or Al Qaeda. Involvement of international terrorist group networks is the most debatable aspect because evidence supporting such connections inconsistent.<sup>120</sup> Gunaratna and Abuza are the most prominent authors claiming a higher level of potential international terrorist involvement than other authors.<sup>121</sup> Most other authors believe that there is no connection between the southern Thailand insurgency and international terrorist groups except for personal connections that were made in Afghanistan during the 1980s. The other source of support comes from directly across the border in Malaysia. This support technically qualifies as international, but, in effect, it is quite local in nature. The border between the two countries is porous, and insurgents on the Thai side have close family ties to people on the Malaysian side. Over the past several decades, Thai and Malaysian authorities have often cooperated against the insurgents. However, since 2004, reports of training camps and arms caches have surfaced, leading some Thai officials to believe that the Malaysian government was responsible for supporting the insurgency, or at least failed to halt efforts by private Malaysians to aid the insurgents in southern Thailand. It is important to determine where the support for the insurgency is coming from to coordinate better counter-insurgency efforts.

This chapter describes the reasons why some authors believe that international terrorist groups are involved in the insurgency and why they most likely are not. It then describes how sympathetic Malaysians are lending support to the insurgency through funding and training while Kuala Lumpur officially desires peace in the Thai provinces.

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<sup>120</sup> Liow and Pathan, "Confronting Ghosts," 70.

<sup>121</sup> Abuza "Tentacles of Terror," 459; Abuza, *Conspiracy*, 159–161; and Gunaratna, Acharya, and Chua, *Conflict*, 59–62.

Finally, it describes the relationship between the governments of Thailand and Malaysia and how they have coordinated efforts to fight the insurgency.

## **A. INTERNATIONAL TERRORIST GROUPS**

A main concern of many Southeast Asian terrorism analysts is the possible influence or operation of international terrorist groups in southern Thailand. It stems from the proximity of Jemaah Islamiyah to the area and from knowledge about Al Qaeda operatives' work with Jemaah Islamiyah. Some analysts believe that the Islamic identity of insurgents in southern Thailand, as well as their use of tactics like the ones employed by insurgents in Iraq, are sufficient to suspect that the insurgents have strong links to international terrorist networks. However, because Jemaah Islamiyah and the southern Thai insurgent groups have such different goals (global jihad versus separatism from Thailand), such claims should be further examined.

### **1. The Argument for a Connection**

Authors who argue there is an international terrorist group connection in southern Thailand argue so in three different categories. First, there is a history of personal connections between leaders in southern Thailand and leaders from Jemaah Islamiyah and Indonesia. Second, Jemaah Islamiyah has provided training and propaganda for the insurgency. Finally, southern Thailand has provided a safe haven for members of Jemaah Islamiyah while they are on the run from security forces in Indonesia and the Philippines. This section presents this argument and evaluates its validity.

#### ***a. Personal Connections***

Abuza lays out many personal links that Jemaah Islamiyah has with southern Thailand insurgent groups. These links began during the Rabitatul Mujahidin (RM) meetings in Malaysia in 1999–2000. The RM meetings only met three times, but the purpose to facilitate coordination of jihadi operations through Jemaah Islamiyah across Asia and included separatist groups from Aceh, Thailand, Myanmar, the

Philippines, and Bangladesh.<sup>122</sup> The ultimate goal of these meetings was to create the Islamic state of Daulah Islamiyah Nusantara that dismantled the governments of Singapore and Malaysia and created a single Islamic state stretching from mainland Malaysia to the southern Philippines.<sup>123</sup> Interrogation reports of prominent Jemaah Islamiyah leaders and organizers of the RM meetings Hambali, Faiz bin Abu Bakar Bafna, and Omar al-Faruq mentioned links to “Islamic militant groups in Pattani, Thailand,” and GMIP.<sup>124</sup> Additionally, a militant group from southern Thailand called Jemaah Salafi, led by Abdul Fatah who has had relations with Jemaah Islamiyah members since training in Afghanistan in the 1980s, maintained connections to Jemaah Islamiyah.<sup>125</sup> One example Abuza cites is when a Jemaah Islamiyah operative went to Narathiwat province in September of 2000 to request assistance in arming Jemaah Islamiyah and returned with 13 weapons.<sup>126</sup> Abuza goes on to cite several more connections Jemaah Islamiyah had with Thai Muslims or with Al-Qaeda operatives who have stayed in southern Thailand. He also mentions that Hambali, while captured in Ayutthaya, Thailand, also spent some amount of time at a school led by BRN-C head Masae Useng, the Th`ammawittaya Foundation School in Yala Province.<sup>127</sup>

Gunaratna also makes connections between the leaders of PULO and the Free Aceh Movement of Indonesia. He cites part of a get-way plan used in the January 2004 PULO attack on army bases in southern Thailand involved the spreading of nails on the road to impede security forces in pursuit. According to Gunaratna, Aceh militants also used this technique.<sup>128</sup> Gunaratna also outlines the many connections that were made during the RM meetings in Malaysia.<sup>129</sup> In his 2005 book, Gunaratna clearly states

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<sup>122</sup> Abuza, *Conspiracy*, 148–149.

<sup>123</sup> Elizabeth John, “The Chilling Jemaah Islamiyah Goal,” *New Straits Times-Management Times*, January 19, 2003.

<sup>124</sup> Abuza, *Conspiracy*, 149. See also Gunaratna, Acharya, and Chua, *Conflict*, 62.

<sup>125</sup> Abuza, *Conspiracy*, 149–150.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 150–151.

<sup>128</sup> Gunaratna, Acharya, and Chua, *Conflict*, 60.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

that while there are personal connections to regional and global terrorist networks, no clear organizational connections had been made up to that time, and Jemaah Islamiyah and Al Qaeda were unlikely to be the masterminds of the southern Thailand insurgency because of a difference in ideology between the southern Thailand separatists and global jihadis.<sup>130</sup>

Abuza and Gunaratna describe these personal connections as strong and widespread throughout the Southeast Asian region. However, many of these connections predate the 2004 start of the current episode of fighting in southern Thailand. In a 2007 interview conducted by Liow and Pathan, a leader of the southern Thailand insurgency stated that he was approached by someone claiming to be a member of Jemaah Islamiyah. The southern Thailand insurgent stated he did not want the movement to become like Jemaah Islamiyah.<sup>131</sup> This interview diminishes the credibility of Abuza's and Gunaratna's claims that personal links to international terrorist groups are helping to drive the insurgency.

***b. Training and Propaganda***

Abuza believes that it is likely that southern Thailand insurgents receive training and propaganda support from Jemaah Islamiyah.<sup>132</sup> It is also likely that the southern Thailand militants sympathize with the efforts of Al Qaeda and Jemaah Islamiyah.<sup>133</sup> With this sympathy comes mutual understanding between Thai insurgents and members of international terrorist organizations where the Thai militants are receptive towards assistance from Jemaah Islamiyah. However, they are still wary of direct assistance from outside terrorist groups.

Davis states that the Patani United Liberation Organization (PULO) gets it inspiration, support, and training from the Middle East and that it was named with

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 60, 63.

<sup>131</sup> Liow and Pathan, "Confronting Ghosts," 71–72.

<sup>132</sup> Abuza, *Conspiracy*, 159.

<sup>133</sup> John Funston, *Southern Thailand: The Dynamics of Conflict* (East-West Center, Washington, D.C., 2008), 45.

reference to the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO).<sup>134</sup> Also, leaders in the PULO are known to have training relations with the Free Aceh Movement.<sup>135</sup> These connections to foreign terrorist groups demonstrate the desire for the PULO to reach out, but only with secular-based movements. These links are in contrast to the BRN-C leaders who received religious training in Indonesia and returned to teaching positions in southern Thailand.<sup>136</sup>

Additionally, Harkat-ul-Jihad-al-Islam of Bangladesh (HUJI-B) was involved with training groups of Thai insurgents.<sup>137</sup> These camps had trainers from Al Qaeda who previously worked in the training camps in Afghanistan. Additionally, HUJI-B also directed substantial funding to the southern Thailand militants. HUJI-B is a founding member of the Osama bin Laden-affiliated International Islamic Front, which, coupled with trainers from Afghanistan, give the Bangladeshi group significant ties to Al Qaeda.<sup>138</sup> While the connection to HUJI-B may have existed, these reports are largely based on the use of similar tactics with interrogation reports turning up no linkages between southern insurgents and the group.<sup>139</sup> The U.S. put HUJI-B on the list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations in 2010.<sup>140</sup> The group still exists as a terrorist organization, but its effectiveness has diminished since the mid-2000s.<sup>141</sup>

Links between international terrorist organizations and the southern Thailand insurgents regarding training and propaganda efforts likely existed, but the effectiveness and reasoning is debatable. If links existed, are they because southern

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<sup>134</sup> Davis, "Borderline Support," 3.

<sup>135</sup> Gunaratna, Acharya, and Chua, *Conflict*, 60.

<sup>136</sup> Davis, "Borderline Support," 3.

<sup>137</sup> B. Raman, "Bangladesh-Myanmar-Thailand—The Jihad Corridor," *South Asia Analysis Group*, Paper No. 1102, (28 August 2004).

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Funston, *Southern Thailand*, 36–37.

<sup>140</sup> "Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment - South Asia," *Sentinel Country Risk Assessments*, October 18, 2011. Accessed April 16, 2012.  
[http://search.janes.com.libproxy.nps.edu/Search/documentView.do?docId=/content1/janesdata/sent/seasu/s\\_eaa007.htm@current&pageSelected=allJanes&keyword=GMIP&backPath=http://search.janes.com/Search&Prod\\_Name=SEAS&](http://search.janes.com.libproxy.nps.edu/Search/documentView.do?docId=/content1/janesdata/sent/seasu/s_eaa007.htm@current&pageSelected=allJanes&keyword=GMIP&backPath=http://search.janes.com/Search&Prod_Name=SEAS&).

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

Thailand militants were seeking out other sources of training, or were international terrorist organizations actively seeking involvement in the fighting? Did similar tactics mean a connection between groups because of training? In the absence of direct evidence, we should not assume that the use in Thailand of tactics found in Iraq implies that insurgents in Thailand received training by insurgents from Iraq. After all, the Thais could have learned the tactics simply by watching television. Also, ideologies of groups like Jemaah Islamiyah and PULO are quite different with regards to motivation (global jihad versus separatism). It is more likely that the southern Thailand militants sought and will continue to seek training outside of Thailand because there are sympathetic organizations with more funding, not because outside terrorist groups are directly supporting them.

*c. Safe Havens*

Southern Thailand has served as a safe haven for terrorists on the run in Southeast Asia. The most prominent of these is the Jemaah Islamiyah leader Hambali who was arrested in Ayutthaya, Thailand, after he sought refuge in Narathiwat Province in 2002.<sup>142</sup> Abdul Fatah, the leader of the southern Thai insurgent group Jemaah Salafi, helped Hambali plan attacks as well as organized a meeting between Hambali and another Jemaah Salafi member in Bangkok.<sup>143</sup> In May 2003, Singaporean and Malaysian Jemaah Islamiyah members were arrested in southern Thailand.<sup>144</sup> These reports suggest that members of Jemaah Islamiyah may be seeking refuge in Thailand, and particularly in the south. However, these reports are dated, and there is a lack of recent reports of international terrorist leaders seeking a safe haven in southern Thailand. Because personal connections still exist, even if they are not presently being leveraged, and southern Thailand has been used as a safe haven, the potential exists for international terrorist leaders to return in the future.

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<sup>142</sup> Gunaratna, Acharya, and Chua, *Conflict*, 62.

<sup>143</sup> Abuza, *Conspiracy*, 150.

<sup>144</sup> Funston, *Southern Thailand*, 35.

## 2. Evaluating the Connection

There appear to be several leaps in the arguments of Abuza and Gunaratna about the importance of international terrorist groups in the region, particularly Jemaah Islamiyah. Astute observers recognize that members of Jemaah Islamiyah have conducted operations in Thailand, but these operations do not link them directly to the fighting in the south. Analysts also recognize that insurgents from southern Thailand have crossed paths with international terror leaders in Indonesia, Pakistan, or Afghanistan, but these meetings do not necessarily link the movements to the fighting in Thailand. While Abuza and Gunaratna have backed their arguments with accounts of many personal encounters between Thai insurgents and foreign terrorists, and of training camps in Aceh or Bangladesh where southern Thailand insurgents have trained, there is little hard evidence of actual assistance or management from international terrorist groups. It is most likely that the high-profile global terrorists captured in Thailand were there more because of the convenience of Thailand that Abuza alluded to in 2002 than because of any ideological similarity to insurgents in Thailand's southern provinces.<sup>145</sup>

The previously described training connections point to similar tactics being used by either Jemaah Islamiyah or HUJI-B. Liow and Pathan point out that many scholars who study modern insurgencies would find that quick, strategic attacks such as motorcycle drive-by shootings and market bombing are common tactics.<sup>146</sup> Reasonable scholars could also conclude that the southern Thailand insurgents did not need to conduct training with the Free Aceh movement to develop the method of scattering nails on the escape path to slow pursuing officials. It is likely that the southern Thailand insurgents already had a level of proficiency to accomplish their goals without the assistance of outside groups.<sup>147</sup>

It is clear that connections between southern Thailand insurgents and international terrorist organizations has declined in the past 5 to 7 years, but even after Jemaah

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<sup>145</sup> Abuza, "Tentacles of Terror," 460.

<sup>146</sup> Liow and Pathan, "Confronting Ghosts," 73.

<sup>147</sup> Abuza, *Conspiracy*, 148.

Islamiyah's power began to wane, Abuza still suggested in 2009 that it would "eventually attempt to make itself central to the conflict."<sup>148</sup> The reality is that past connections have either decreased in importance or vanished, and a lack of ideological similarity discourages insurgents in southern Thailand from seeking direct assistance from international terrorist groups. A more important source of support comes from sympathetic citizens from Thailand's neighbors to the south, Malaysia.

## **B. MALAYSIA'S ROLE IN SOUTHERN THAILAND**

It is important to examine the role Malaysia plays in setting the conditions for the insurgency. This section describes the involvement of criminals and sympathetic Malaysian citizens in supporting the insurgency and Malaysia's response to those activities and Thailand's requests for assistance. Support of terrorist operations comes from funding, training, and equipping. An uncontrolled border between Thailand and Malaysia facilitates these logistical operations. Support from Malaysia in coordinating anti-terrorism efforts seeks to address these issues, but sometimes not to the satisfaction of Thai authorities.

Malaysia is the most plausible source of international support because the evidence is stronger and more recent. Reports of capture of militants and war materiel are usually more reliable because both Malaysia and Thailand are involved in the capture. Reports of support are quite frequent. As the southern Thailand insurgency has escalated, Jemaah Islamiyah has waned in power, suggesting that the southern Thailand insurgents receive support from elsewhere. Malaysians provide that support through funding, training, and materiel.

Because of the cultural and ethnic similarity of the people of northern Malaysia and southern Thailand, private Malaysians and the northern Malaysia based political party Parti Islam seMalaysia (PAS) have shared roles in lending moral support and funding to the southern Thailand insurgents. In 2004, Thai Government security adviser Kitti Rattanachaya believed that the Islamic separatist movement in southern Thailand was receiving assistance from the Kumpulan Mujahedeen Malaysia (KMM), an

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<sup>148</sup> Abuza, *Conspiracy*, 159–160.



organization that is the Malaysian branch of Jemaah Islamiyah.<sup>149</sup> Jane's currently assesses the KMM as a dormant organization, but it was once thought to have 60 members.<sup>150</sup> The cultural relations between the people of northern Malaysian and Southern Thailand and Malaysia's dual-citizenship policy (which has been discussed openly by both Thai and Malaysian officials) complicate matters.<sup>151</sup>

## **1. Funding**

Funding is an important part of any insurgency, and security efforts to slow or halt funding are important. Thai leaders have taken positions that large sums of money are coming from tom yum soup restaurants in northern Malaysia and shops in Kuala Lumpur. Pictures were released in February 2012 of Thai Police Colonel Thavee Sodsong visiting these restaurants in northern Malaysia.<sup>152</sup> While the level and importance of funding is debatable, it is clear that these venues are still important to Thai security officials.

Prominent Thai officials have made claims that private Malaysian organizations are funding the southern Thailand insurgency. In 2007, former Thai Prime Minister, General (retired) Surayud, accused Malaysian soup restaurants of funding the insurgency.<sup>153</sup> Then-Prime Minister Surayud Chulanont commented in 2007 that Malaysian soup kitchens were a major source of funding. The evidence for this claim was not reliable, and his remarks angered the government in Kuala Lumpur.<sup>154</sup> However,

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<sup>149</sup> Gunaratna, Acharya, and Chua, *Conflict*, 41 and 60; "Attackers had 'Outside Help,'" *The Nation*, January 9, 2004; and "Thailand Islamic Insurgency," *Globalsecurity.org*. Accessed April 11, 2012. <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/thailand2.htm>.

<sup>150</sup> "Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment - Southeast Asia – Security, Malaysia," *Sentinel Country Risk Assessments* November 18, 2011. Accessed April 17, 2012. [http://search.janes.com.libproxy.nps.edu/Search/documentView.do?docId=/content1/janesdata/sent/seasu/seasu004.htm@current&pageSelected=allJanes&keyword=Kumpulan%20Mujahideen%20Malaysia&backPath=http://search.janes.com/Search&Prod\\_Name=SEAS&](http://search.janes.com.libproxy.nps.edu/Search/documentView.do?docId=/content1/janesdata/sent/seasu/seasu004.htm@current&pageSelected=allJanes&keyword=Kumpulan%20Mujahideen%20Malaysia&backPath=http://search.janes.com/Search&Prod_Name=SEAS&).

<sup>151</sup> Liow, "Security Situation," 541.

<sup>152</sup> "The Dancers are Invisible, Their Shadows are Thrown on the Screen and That's all the Audience Sees. No, This is not a Definition of a Shadow Dance, It's a Description of the Armed Conflict in the Deep South of Thailand," *The Nation*, April 12, 2012.

<sup>153</sup> "In Need of Help to Douse the Flames," *The Economist*, February 15, 2007. Accessed June 15, 2007. [http://www.economist.com/PrinterFriendly.cfm?story\\_id=8706170](http://www.economist.com/PrinterFriendly.cfm?story_id=8706170).

<sup>154</sup> Gray and Joshi, "Thailand Insurgency."

it has been documented that shopkeepers and soup kitchens in Malaysia are providing funding for the insurgency in southern Thailand, just not to the extent Thai leaders believed.<sup>155</sup> Davis believes that while it is difficult to estimate the amount of money funding the insurgency, it is likely a relatively small amount, due in part to skimming along the process.<sup>156</sup> In confidential discussions in Malaysia, Vatikiotis learned that expatriate Patani shopkeepers, particularly in the city of Kuala Lumpur, donated RM 1,000 each month to members of the GMIP and/or BRN-C.<sup>157</sup> This network rose approximately US \$300 per month per group member to provide monetary support to the southern Thailand insurgency.<sup>158</sup> These shops and the soup kitchens that supposedly provided RM 100 per month could provide a substantial amount of income to the insurgency, but it is most likely that whatever was actually taken was reduced by skimming that potentially went to funding bureaucratic budgets for schools and services in the insurgency-affected areas.<sup>159</sup> The previously mentioned evidence suggests Malaysians are providing support, but the official stance of Malaysia is noninterference. Kuala Lumpur is not officially providing funding, but fund raising activities do take place inside Malaysia's borders.

## **2. Training and Materiel**

Evidence exists that Thai insurgents use areas of northern Malaysia for training and acquiring materiel for use in southern Thailand. These claims are somewhat controversial, but they exist nonetheless. In December 2004, former Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra accused Malaysia of harboring training camps in the northern Malaysian state of Kelantan, which borders southern Thailand. The basis of the accusation was photographs offered by Deputy Interior Minister Sutham Saengprathum

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<sup>155</sup> Davis, "Borderline Support," 6, Gray and Joshi, "Thailand Insurgency," and Vatikiotis, "Resolving International Conflicts," 36.

<sup>156</sup> Davis "Borderline Support," 6.

<sup>157</sup> Vatikiotis, "Resolving International Conflicts," 36.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

<sup>159</sup> Davis, "Borderline Support," 6.

that an unnamed source provided without dates.<sup>160</sup> The pictures were clear enough to be used as evidence in court, and the former Prime Minister used them as leverage to accuse both Malaysia and Indonesia of having ties with the terrorists conducting activities in Thailand.<sup>161</sup> Malaysia reacted by accusing Thaksin of attempting to cover up the Thai's inability to control the insurgency that had reignited in January of 2004.<sup>162</sup> It is now widely known that logistic support has come out of Malaysia, but in 2004, when Thaksin made these incendiary statements, Thai intelligence was regarded as vague by Malaysia.<sup>163</sup>

In more recent years, more evidence has emerged that insurgent training is taking place in Malaysia. Thai intelligence officials state that clandestine training camps located in both Thailand and Malaysia are the locations where numerous commandos trained before conducting large-scale attacks in Thailand.<sup>164</sup> According to Thai intelligence, insurgents who trained at these camps were responsible for the large-scale, coordinated January 19, 2011, arms raid in Ra-ngae district and the April 29, 2011, attack on busses full of Royal Thai marines returning from leave.<sup>165</sup> These types of attacks display a level of brazenness and coordination rarely seen before 2010, and the highly-specialized training of insurgent commandos in Thailand and Malaysia is a significant contributing factor.<sup>166</sup>

Evidence suggests that Malaysia is also a source of materiel. Thai intelligence officials believe that ammonium nitrate frequently came into southern Thailand from

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<sup>160</sup> "Thai 'Proof' of Malaysian Camps," BBC News, December 21, 2004. Accessed June 15, 2007. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asiapacific/4114091.stm>.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid.

<sup>163</sup> International Crisis Group, "Stalemate in Southern Thailand," Asia Briefing Number 113 (2010): 5.

<sup>164</sup> Anthony Davis, "The Professionals—Separatism in Southern Thailand," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, August 10, 2011. Accessed October 15, 2011. <http://jtic.janes.com.libproxy.nps.edu/JDIC/JTIC/documentView.do?docId=/content1/janesdata/mags/jir/history/jir2011/jir11173.htm@current&pageSelected=allJanes&keyword=The%20>

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

Malaysia.<sup>167</sup> On December 14, 2009, Malaysia criminal investigators looking for drug traffickers found a large cache of IED making materials in Pasir Mas district, Kelantan. Thai intelligence officials believed there were four or five more such caches in Malaysia close to the Thai border.<sup>168</sup> It is apparent that the southern Thailand insurgents are using Malaysia as a source of materiel.

### **3. Ease of Border Crossing to Malaysia**

The ease with which supporters of the insurgency can cross the border facilitates funds, training, and materiel support. Furthermore, the cultural relations between the people of northern Malaysia and southern Thailand create a complicated situation along the Malaysian border. While the government of Malaysia may denounce the separatist movement, many people in Malaysia sympathize with the Malay-Muslim separatist movement. The ease of border crossings combined with the fact that many people living and working in southern Thailand are dual citizens of Malay ethnicity concerns the Thai government, but little has been done to effectively control the border.

Thailand has identified dual citizenship as a major factor contributing to the insurgents' ability to evade capture. The problem with a policy of dual citizenship is that insurgents can operate in Thailand and then quickly escape into Malaysia where Thai officials currently do not have the right to "hot pursuit." Likewise, insurgents hiding in Malaysia could plan and train there for an operation in Thailand, cross the border, and carry out the attacks. Both parties have agreed that the dual citizenship issue presents serious problems to controlling the insurgency, but little has been done to end the policy on either side.<sup>169</sup>

The problem of dual citizenship is exacerbated by the fact that even when people cross the border legally, they cross with significant ease. The border crossing at Sungei

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<sup>167</sup> Anthony Davis, "Explosive Evolution—Thai Bomb-Makers Adapt," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, September 11, 2009. Accessed November 14, 2009.  
[http://jtic.janes.com.libproxy.nps.edu/JDIC/JTIC/documentView.do?docId=/content1/janesdata/mags/jir/hi story/jir2009/jir10719.htm@current&pageSelected=allJanes&keyword=explosive%20evolution&backPath =http://jtic.janes.com/JDIC/JTIC/search&Prod\\_Name=&activeNav=/JDIC/JTIC](http://jtic.janes.com.libproxy.nps.edu/JDIC/JTIC/documentView.do?docId=/content1/janesdata/mags/jir/hi story/jir2009/jir10719.htm@current&pageSelected=allJanes&keyword=explosive%20evolution&backPath =http://jtic.janes.com/JDIC/JTIC/search&Prod_Name=&activeNav=/JDIC/JTIC).

<sup>168</sup> Davis, "Borderline Support."

<sup>169</sup> Liow, "Security Situation," 541.

Golok has been problematic because it was notorious for ease of crossing due to a general lack of law enforcement in ensuring people crossing the border had proper documentation.<sup>170</sup> Malaysians and Thais who wish to cross the border without proper documentation can do so at Sungei Golok, so ending Malaysia's dual-citizenship program will not halt the insurgent assistance from Malaysia unless the border is effectively controlled.<sup>171</sup>

Even if Thailand and Malaysia agreed to end the practice of dual citizenship, the core problem of uncontrolled border crossing will still continue because people can easily cross the border without proper documentation at crossings like Sungei Golok.<sup>172</sup> Until Thailand controls the border, it cannot expect the reap results from an unlikely end to dual citizenship. To combat the problem of a porous border, Thaksin proposed in February of 2004 that security fences be built along some of the more notorious portions of the border in an effort to prevent criminals who killed Thai officials to run back to Malaysia.<sup>173</sup> Again in February 2007, Thailand proposed to build a security fence in order to control migration to and from Malaysia. The proposal was for a 17-mile security fence to assist in controlling flows of people in the troublesome Betong district, Yala province.<sup>174</sup> However, the proposed fence will not control immigration at the previously mentioned Sungei Golok crossing in Narathiwat province due to the persistent corruption on both sides of the border.<sup>175</sup> Thai and Malaysian officials claimed to have increased border security operations, but because of corruption, known criminals have been allowed to cross in and out of Thailand.<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> Ibid., 541–542.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 542.

<sup>173</sup> Dhul Hijjah, "Thailand to Build Fences Along Malaysia Border," *Arab News* February 18, 2004, and Piyanart Srivalo and Samascha Hoonsara, "Culprits Finding Refuge in Malaysia," *The Nation*, April 2, 2004.

<sup>174</sup> "Thai Leader Calls for a Security Wall Along Malaysian Border," *International Herald Tribune*, *Reuters*, February 4, 2007.

<sup>175</sup> Muhammad Bakashmar, "Winning the Battles, Losing the War? An Assessment of Counterterrorism in Malaysia," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 20:4 (2008): 490.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

Security fence problems also create cross-border diplomatic difficulties with Malaysia. Thaksin first suggested the construction of a security fence in 2005. His proposal was to stop “militant infiltration” by sealing off the entire 500 kilometer border.<sup>177</sup> Malaysia took serious issue with the proposal, mostly because Malaysia insists that no militants exist on the southern side of the border.<sup>178</sup> The 2007 proposal’s stated goal is to confront “problems with border crossings and smuggling.”<sup>179</sup> Former Prime Minister Surayud believed that the Thai government could go ahead with construction without the consent of Kuala Lumpur, even though the outrage over the first proposal was in recent memory.<sup>180</sup> While the goal and span of the fence did not anger Malaysia as much as Thaksin’s proposal, neglecting to discuss the issue with the southern neighbor did not aid in repairing damaged relations stemming from the Thaksin regime.

### **C. COORDINATION BETWEEN THAILAND AND MALAYSIA**

Modern Thai-Malaysian border cooperation dates back to 1949 with the creation of the Thai-Malaysian Police Frontier Agreement. Formal cooperation continues today with the Agreement Between the Government of Malaysia and the Government of Thailand on Border Cooperation signed by the two states in 1977.<sup>181</sup> These agreements, and several others in between, were mainly an effort to contain the Communist Party of Malaya (CPM) when it sought refuge in Thailand to conduct attacks in Malaya, but they were also geared to focus on cross-border crime and smuggling. Thailand’s interests in the agreements became more prominent in March of 1970 with the creation of the Antiterrorism Agreement that was specifically written to combat both Malayan Communists and Thai Muslim insurgents.<sup>182</sup> Malaysia’s interests were primarily to defeat the CPM as it did not agree with Muslims being lumped into the same category as

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<sup>177</sup> "Thai Leader Calls for a Security Wall Along Malaysian Border."

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

<sup>181</sup> Amitav Acharya, "A Survey of Military Cooperation Among the ASEAN States: Bilateralism or Alliance?" Center for International and Strategic Studies, Occasional Paper Number 14 (1990): 9.

<sup>182</sup> Liow, "Security Situation," 541.

the Communists it was fighting.<sup>183</sup> Although relations were shaky between Thailand and Malaysia regarding the Muslim separatist movement, the border agreement between the two states is still viewed as one of the most successful in ASEAN.<sup>184</sup> The institutionalization of the agreement is the most effective aspect of the Thai-Malaysian security arrangement. In 1959, the two states created the General Border Committee (GBC) and the Regional Border Committee (RBC). The GBC's mission was to develop policies to eradicate insurgents along the border. The RBC was to coordinate tactics, intelligence sharing, and supervision for combined Thai-Malaysian operations against insurgents.<sup>185</sup> Intelligence sharing has been an informal part of the Thai-Malaysian agreement since 1949, but it was further institutionalized into operations with the 1965 creation of the combined intelligence headquarters designed to track and report insurgent activities. Thailand and Malaysia allow for "reciprocal posting" of intelligence and report size, activity, and location of insurgents as well as effective tactics against them.<sup>186</sup> This basis of coordination between the borders led to a new agreement in 2010 that reworked border security issues to include bilateral military operations and allowed for more permissive economic activity in the border area.<sup>187</sup>

Thailand and Malaysia have made much progress on border security, but there have been serious political issues that detract from the effectiveness of these policies. Malaysia took diplomatic heat in 1998 from the international Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) for turning over suspected militants to Thai authorities who would presumably mistreat them. More recently, the Tak Bai incident of October 2004 that resulted in the suffocation of 78 prisoners drew international attention to Thailand, and

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<sup>183</sup> Ibid., 541.

<sup>184</sup> Acharya, "A Survey of Military Cooperation," 9.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., 9–10.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>187</sup> "Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment - Southeast Asia External Affairs, Thailand," *Sentinel Country Risk Assessments* September 16, 2011. Accessed April 17, 2012.  
[http://search.janes.com.libproxy.nps.edu/Search/documentView.do?docId=/content1/janesdata/sent/seasu/t\\_hais080.htm@current&pageSelected=allJanes&keyword=Thailand%20border%20issues%20Malaysia&backPath=http://search.janes.com/Search&Prod\\_Name=SEAS&#toclink-j0011030021014](http://search.janes.com.libproxy.nps.edu/Search/documentView.do?docId=/content1/janesdata/sent/seasu/t_hais080.htm@current&pageSelected=allJanes&keyword=Thailand%20border%20issues%20Malaysia&backPath=http://search.janes.com/Search&Prod_Name=SEAS&#toclink-j0011030021014).

See also "Malaysia, Thailand Agree to Improve Trade in Border Areas," *BBC Worldwide Monitoring* September 25, 2010.

Malaysia withdrew its offer for security cooperation.<sup>188</sup> On a personal level, Malaysian Prime Minister Abdullah was particularly offended that the Thaksin regime would take such harsh and irresponsible measures against Malaya Muslims only nine days after the two officials shook hands on the Golok River Bridge at the border of the two states.<sup>189</sup> Another source of Malaysian concern occurred when 131 Malay Muslims fled to Malaysia to escape Thai authorities' presumed injustices in August of 2005. In keeping with the ASEAN tradition of noninterference, Bangkok suggest that Kuala Lumpur keep the issue quiet to allow the two states to solve the problem without outside influence. Given the close time proximity to the Tak Bai incident and previous international concerns of Malaysia handing over prisoners for potential mistreatment by Thai authorities, Malaysia contacted the United Nations Commission for Refugees for a visit.<sup>190</sup> Bangkok felt betrayed by its neighbor it had helped counter the communist insurgency for so many years.

In a rash of ill-conceived logic, Bangkok became impatient with Malaysia's lack of cooperation in extraditing refugees or prisoners and believes that Kuala Lumpur's behavior is directly aiding separatists. Further, some analysts in Bangkok believe that Malaysia is looking for greater Muslim support by aiding the Muslim separatist movement.<sup>191</sup> Based on the evidence, it seems that the problem is not Malaysia's support for the insurgents but the Thai authorities' mistreatment of its own prisoners. To further complicate matters, Thailand had engaged in what Kuala Lumpur regarded as the 2003 extra-judicial killing of GMIP member Manase Jeh-da, who was extradited to Thailand days before he was killed by Thai authorities.<sup>192</sup> However, both states believe that the other is behaving inappropriately in the matter of coordinated border security efforts, and relations have suffered greatly. In 2007, Malaysia and Thailand addressed these grievances by cooperatively building up economic and educational infrastructures in

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<sup>188</sup> Vatikiotis, "Resolving International Conflicts," 40.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

<sup>192</sup> International Crisis Group, "Stalemate in Southern Thailand," 5.



southern Thailand.<sup>193</sup> Malaysia even offered to serve as an objective third-party moderator in order to assist Thai authorities in striking a deal with the insurgents.<sup>194</sup> Malaysia seems willing to work with Thailand to reestablish bilateral security ties, but Bangkok must help its cause by not abusing human rights and staying away from unsubstantiated claims of Malaysian assistance in the southern Thailand separatist movement.

Bangkok remains skeptical of the efforts of Kuala Lumpur in part because of Kuala Lumpur's soft approach to the "separatist old guard."<sup>195</sup> The purpose of allowing known BRN leaders freedom of maneuver in Malaysia, according to former Prime Minister Mahathir, was to allow the old guard a place to speak freely on behalf of the Malay Muslims in southern Thailand with rules forbidding them to speak poorly of or take up arms against either Thai or Malaysian governments. These rules have driven some of the old guard to the more democratic and permissive Indonesia.<sup>196</sup> This stance addresses two of Malaysia's priorities to prevent the violence to spill over into Malaysia and not turn a blind eye to the suppression of the Malay Muslims.<sup>197</sup>

While separate efforts by the governments of Thailand and Malaysia will interdict some of the insurgent activity, the most effective way to handle the cross-border situation is through intelligence-sharing between the states. The anti-terrorism pact between Thailand and Malaysia is a formal building block, but the actual method of implementation has come into question due to some embarrassments in the higher reaches of both governments. Thailand and Malaysia must coordinate efforts and intelligence to build an executable plan for this cross-border problem.<sup>198</sup>

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<sup>193</sup> Ron Corben, "Thailand, Malaysia Agree to Step up Security Cooperation," *VOA News*, February 12, 2007.

<sup>194</sup> "Malaysia Offers to Help Thailand Hold Peace Talks with Muslim Separatists," *The Irrawaddy*, March 22, 2007.

<sup>195</sup> Liow and Pathan, "Confronting Ghosts," 77.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>198</sup> Gunaratna, Acharya, and Chua, *Conflict*, 109–110.

#### D. CONCLUSION

The involvement of international terrorists in Thailand appears to be based on their perception of Thailand as “nation of convenience” and not a desire to play a role in the southern Thailand insurgency. Humanitarian issues exist in southern Thailand, and much of insurgents’ support comes from a Malaysian perception of injustice in Thailand because of failed Thai policies. There is reason to be concerned that regional terrorist groups may join the fight against the Thai state in support of their religious brethren, but evidence for this is lacking. In fact, southern Thailand insurgents have turned assistance away from such groups. In interviews conducted by Liow and Pathan, Jemaah Islamiyah members approached an insurgent leader offering assistance, but they were turned away for two primary reasons. First, the Jemaah Islamiyah operators had little concern for the cause of the southern Thailand insurgents. Secondly, the southern fighters did not want to be associated with global movements and the attention they would bring from the West.<sup>199</sup> International support for the insurgency seems to come from directly south of the Thai border much more than from regional or global hubs of terror.

Thai-Malaysian border relations, while strained, remain formalized and somewhat effective. There is a decades-long history of Thai accusations that Malaysia is not fully committed to fighting the insurgency, but Bangkok has given Kuala Lumpur reason to be wary by its extrajudicial killing of extradited criminals. Also, Malaysia has different priorities in quelling the insurgency. Of course, it wishes to see the end of violence, but Thailand desires to end the violence and assimilate the Muslim Malays into the Thai nation by killing or capturing militants. Malaysia has more pragmatic goals to contain the violence inside Thailand, prevent the arising of an international jihadi movement out of what is a Malay ethno-centric struggle, and to be viewed as sympathetic to the plight of mistreated Malays by Thai security forces.<sup>200</sup> Thailand can stand to gain much ground by approaching its relationship with Malaysia in a more tactful manner in order to gain intelligence, which has remained a critical shortfall of the counterinsurgency fight by incorporating Malay security forces who at minimum speak the language of the

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<sup>199</sup> Liow and Pathan, “Confronting Ghosts,” 71–72.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid., 79.

separatists.<sup>201</sup> Improved cross-border relations could also result in better diplomatic ties with other nations where insurgents are involved, such as Indonesia. If Thailand continues being viewed as the bully in the insurgency, cooperation will remain minimal.

Even though support comes primarily from Malaysia, there is still a need to remain alert to indications that international terrorists are operating in the border provinces. In 2006, there was great concern that several well-funded international terrorist groups were considering taking over the southern border region of Thailand.<sup>202</sup> These concerns remain today with all scholars, some more so than others. Since security and intelligence resource are limited, however, the focus should be on ending support from across the border instead of combating a future threat from international terrorists. The southern Thailand insurgency is likely to remain localized with support from Malaysia because it is a struggle based on ethnic separatism. International terrorists with regional or global aspirations do not want to waste resources on a movement that provides little towards their goals. Likewise, the southern Thailand insurgents do not want the attention that comes with associating with international terrorists.

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<sup>201</sup> Anthony Davis, "Village Violence – Thai Insurgents Heighten Communal Tensions." *Jane's Intelligence Review* (June 1, 2007): 7. Accessed April 16, 2012.  
[http://search.janes.com.libproxy.nps.edu/Search/documentView.do?docId=/content1/janesdata/mags/jir/history/jir2007/jir10164.htm@current&pageSelected=allJanes&keyword=village%20violence&backPath=http://search.janes.com/Search&Prod\\_Name=JIR&](http://search.janes.com.libproxy.nps.edu/Search/documentView.do?docId=/content1/janesdata/mags/jir/history/jir2007/jir10164.htm@current&pageSelected=allJanes&keyword=village%20violence&backPath=http://search.janes.com/Search&Prod_Name=JIR&).

<sup>202</sup> Ismail Wolff, "Jihadist Threat to South Insurgency," *Thai Day*, March 13, 2006.

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## IV. CONCLUSION

The fighting in southern Thailand makes it one of the most dangerous places in the world today in spite of the lack of direct involvement of international terrorist groups.<sup>203</sup> It is imperative that security policy makers understand the causes of the insurgency and the actors. The evidence shows that while the insurgency is taking on a religious tone, it still remains an ethnic struggle for separatism. Leaders are using religious networks to recruit and motivate fighters, but the targets of the violence are typically government agents who are viewed as conspirators of the state. The evidence also shows that while international terrorists have shown an interest in the conflict, international support for the southern Thailand insurgency ultimately comes from their neighbors in northern Malaysia. Ethnicity, proximity, and a poorly controlled border contribute to the ease of this support. Malays want to help the people they view as the victims of a repressive Thai state. International terrorists are not likely to join in such a fight, as long as insurgents focus demands on autonomy.

Malaysia cannot be viewed as indifferent to the fact that some of its citizens support the fighting in southern Thailand, but it also cannot be perceived as giving in to Thai pressure against its own ethnic brethren. The Malaysian government should balance policies to address the religious and humanitarian concerns of their citizens and assist Thai authorities in bringing peace to southern Thailand. Both Malaysia and Thailand would benefit from peace in Thailand's south, but each government must work with the other, balancing internal politics with regional policies, to reach an acceptable, effective plan of action.

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<sup>203</sup> Steve Sandford, "In Thailand's South, New Worries After Latest Bombing," *VOA News*, April 6, 2012. Accessed April 10, 2012. <http://www.voanews.com/english/news/asia/In-Thailands-South-New-Worries-After-Latest-Bombing-146492335.html>

#### A. PROPOSITIONS FOR FUTURE INCREASE IN INTERNATIONAL TERRORIST GROUP INVOLVEMENT

There remains a danger that international terrorists may involve themselves in the fight, whether they are invited or not, and analysts should remain vigilant for such connections in the future.<sup>204</sup> The dangers with regional terrorist groups in the fighting are the increased levels of experience, command and control, and funding. The best-case scenario is to end the fighting, or at least achieve a minimal level of insurgent-based violence, before international terror groups gain control of the situation. If this does not happen, the consequences are that the fighting could begin to resemble the fighting in Iraq with Western and Islamic fighters waging war in the area.

A concern exists that international terrorist may get involved in the fighting because a reduced number of U.S. troops in Iraq and Afghanistan could create an influx of fighters trying to remain relevant in their own causes.<sup>205</sup> The concern is that these highly-trained fighters will move to wherever they see the next venue for jihad, which could be Thailand due to its cooperation with the United States. in Iraq and the mismanagement of the crisis.<sup>206</sup> The southern provinces may become a planning or staging area for international terrorists to launch attacks on Western targets in Thailand.

While there is a potential for outside terrorist involvement within the Thai borders, it remains unlikely they will directly involve themselves in the southern Thailand conflict. The ideologies of Al Qaeda and Jemaah Islamiyah are vastly different from the separatist fighters' ideologies because they are focused on global jihad and defeating the United States and Israel.<sup>207</sup> Not even the other Muslims in Thailand want to get involved in the south.<sup>208</sup> Likewise, the Malay Muslims of southern Thailand as of yet do not desire to be tied to any of the global Islamist groups for fear of the attention

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<sup>204</sup> Wolff, "Jihadist Threat." See also Liow and Pathan "Confronting Ghosts," 71.

<sup>205</sup> Abuza, *Conspiracy*, 161.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid.

<sup>207</sup> Gunaratna, Acharya, and Chua, *Conflict*, 63.

<sup>208</sup> Andrew D.W. Forbes, "Thailand's Muslim Minorities: Assimilation, Secession, or Coexistence?" *Asian Survey* 22:11 (1982): 1085. See also Liow "Security Situation," 534.

such an affiliation would bring.<sup>209</sup> The potential to use the southern provinces as a staging area is more likely due to potential sympathy from the local Malay Muslims.

## **B. HOW TO END INSURGENCY AND AVOID INTERNATIONAL TERRORIST GROUP INVOLVEMENT**

It is important for Thailand to at minimum gain control of the southern provinces before international terrorists do join the fighting. Bangkok has had a difficult time managing the insurgency without outside influence from international terror. If these groups moved into the region, the situation would likely become too complex for the Thais to solve alone. Security forces need to drive a wedge between the insurgents and the populace to provide critical services and a legitimate economic foundation before international terrorist provide that role.

A good step for Bangkok to take would be to invite a third party to mediate discussions between insurgents and security forces. However, this method is unlikely because Thailand has “categorically rejected” involving third parties in the talks for fear of being forced into granting independence followed by secession of the border provinces.<sup>210</sup> Malaysia seems a likely fit to fulfill this role, and Kuala Lumpur has usually been helpful in assisting Thailand. Malaysians are sympathetic to the insurgents’ cause, but the official stance is to support efforts to end the insurgency. Thailand has harmed relations by making public accusations that Kuala Lumpur was facilitating the insurgency. Thailand needs to make an effort to repair relations so that it can co-opt Malaysia into a peace-talks forum with the Thai interests of non-secession in mind.

History leads us to believe that the southern Thailand insurgency is about preserving the culture of the Malays and the old Kingdom of Patani. Religion is a main aspect of this culture, and security forces should be aware of this undercurrent. Thailand should focus efforts to develop the economy of the region while improving border security.

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<sup>209</sup> Liow and Pathan, “Confronting Ghosts,” 71–72. See also Chalk and Ungerer, “Neighbourhood Watch,” 31.

<sup>210</sup> Peter Chalk, “Threat Perception—Differing Counter-Insurgency Techniques in Southeast Asia,” *Jane’s Intelligence Review* June 1, 2010.

Thai security forces need to address the issues of the populace to persuade them to stop cooperating with and aiding the insurgents and start reporting their activity, reducing the permissiveness of the area. Statements from Gunaratna that “the immediate challenge facing the Thai authorities is to disrupt existing links between the insurgents and foreign organizations,” are misguided as these connections are unproven.<sup>211</sup> Steps should be taken to end the insurgency before Gunaratna’s and Abuza’s perceptions become a dangerous reality. In order to maintain control, Thailand must recognize that the Malays do not desire to be Thai. If they continue to be treated as sub-Thai, they will continue to revolt. There should be a level playing field with the Thais and Malays that fosters security and economic development.

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<sup>211</sup> Gunaratna, Acharya, and Chua, *Conflict*, 114.



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